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November 1898.

GOLDEN BULLETS

A STORY IN THE DAYS OF AKBER AND ELIZABETH.

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A STORY IN THE DAYS OF AKBER AND ELIZABETH.

BY

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PREFACE.

OUR traditional culture, bespeaking attention for certain persons and subjects, has a tendency to keep knowledge and interest in narrow channels; and even people who read merely for amusement are often strangely indifferent to variety. Nevertheless the age is unfavourable to limitations, and the bounds of historical interest are evidently enlarging. Many people now go to India; more have to do with it; and some of them have studied its history. These I should fain ask to give their opinion whether this picture of Indian life at the most brilliant period of Mussulman rule is a true one or not.

The book is, however, not designed solely for persons who have special relations with India. Interest goes along with knowledge, and is fed by it. I hope that many who are willing to learn something about our Eastern empire, in a pleasant way, will turn to these pages. If they thus gain a more vivid conception of a memorable time, they will not refuse to believe that they have really learned something.

WILLIAM W. IRELAND.

PRESTON LODGE,
PRESTONPANS, 6th September, 1890.

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IN THE DAYS OF AKBER AND ELIZABETH.

CHAPTER I.

THE VOYAGE OF THE "UNICORN" TO INDIA—A BRUSH WITH THE PORTUGUESE.

IN the year of grace 1598, eleven merchants met in the "Jerusalem," in the city of London, to consult together about fitting out a ship which should be sent to seek a share of the trade with the East Indies, by which the Portuguese had gained such wealth for a hundred years, that is since Vasco da Gama doubled the Cape of Good Hope, and landed at Calicut in 1498. After the defeat of Don Sebastian in Morocco, Portugal had been seized upon by the King of Spain, Philip II. As Spain was at war with England, and as the Casa da India at Lisbon was now shut to the English traders and the revolted Hollanders, they found the wares of the Indies so dear and difficult to be had that they came to the conclusion they must either want them altogether, or go and seek them on their own account. These merchants, albeit that profit was their main aim, had a share of the adventurous spirit of the times.

They had helped Frobisher in his voyages to seek for a north-west passage to the Indies ; but giving up hope in this direction, they now resolved to try the Cape route, and open a direct trade with the Indies in despite of the Portuguese, who, though they had become subject to the great monarchy of Spain, still rigidly guarded the monopoly of their trade in the Indian Seas. Their power in these waters was secured by a line of ports which they had seized and held by garrisons—Mozambique, Sofala, Ormuz, Diu, Damao, Bassein, Choul, Bombay, Goa, Malaca, and Macao.

For this adventure the London merchants had been collecting information for years. Ralph Fitch, who visited India in 1586, who had been at Agra and descended the Ganges to Lower Bengal, had returned to England (1591), giving tempting accounts of the products of India and the grandeur of the Great Mogul. The Dutch, who had been making inquiries on their part, had sent a squadron of eight ships, which sailed from Amsterdam on the 13th of May of the same year (1598). The London merchants now bought a ship of 400 tons, which was thought a very large vessel in England in those days. They had bespoken the services of Edward Hawkhurst, a mariner who had commanded a frigate against the Spanish Armada, and had been with Drake in his last expedition to the West Indies. They had also a Fleming, Peter Gyzen, who had fled to England to escape the Catholic persecution. He had made the voyage to Goa, could speak Portuguese, and declared himself able to take them into the Indian

seas. Under the command of Captain Hawkhurst, the good ship called the *Unicorn* loosed from Gravesend on the 26th of August, 1598. She bore a crew of eighty-two able and sufficient men, with fourteen guns of somewhat unusual size and range. She was accompanied by a pinnace of eighty tons, with a crew of twenty men, six guns, and two falconets of bronze. In those times it was not safe for a ship to go unarmed or without a fighting crew; but the master was advised that, as war and trade never went well together, he should not seek to plunder the Spanish or Portuguese, but should make it his prime endeavour to bring his ship safely into some Indian port, where a profitable commerce might be begun. The cargo consisted mainly of tin, lead, and quicksilver, cloth of various kinds, fire-arms, sword blades, and knives. In those days it was the custom for a merchant to go along with the wares on a voyage to a distant market, but none of these worthy traders was found willing to risk his life upon so perilous an adventure. Hence they were well pleased when a young man, Master Stephen Ashbourne, whose father had been a goldsmith in the city, declared himself willing, not only to go in charge of the cargo, but also to bear a considerable share in the sum made up for purchase and outfit. He was also the means, through the interest of the Earl of Essex, Master General of the Ordnance, of procuring from Queen Elizabeth letters to divers princes in India, that shrewd princess bespeaking at the same time a share in the profits of the transaction, and sending her por-

trait to the Mogul emperor, accounts of whose greatness had already reached her ears.

In these days sailing voyages were very long, as seamen did not know how the winds might be expected to blow in different places, as has now been ascertained by prolonged observations. They, therefore, did not know where to steer to find the winds that might help them. Besides this, they ran themselves into much danger by keeping too near the coasts. Ships set out with a large crew, and thought themselves lucky if, in a voyage round the Cape, they did not lose more than a quarter of their men. Captain Hawkhurst was known to be careful of his men, and was one of the first to use against scurvy certain bottles of the juice of lemons, which he gave to each one as long as it would last, three spoonfuls every morning fasting. They touched at one of the Cape Verd Islands, and then at St. Helena, where they took in water, and some fresh provisions. Coming near the Cape of Good Hope they were so beat about for four days by a furious tempest that they had to cut away the mainmast in hopes of saving the ship, and never saw the pinnace any more. Fearful of being set upon in this helpless condition by hostile vessels, Captain Hawkhurst bore away from sight of the mountain range above Table Bay, which was a favourite touching-place for ships going and coming from the Indies. Doubling the Cape des Aguilhas, he ran his ship into an inlet to the north-east, probably Mosel Bay, where he landed and rested his weary crew. Here they met with negroes with frizzled hair, who

clicked in their speech, but were clever in understanding signs. They gave knives, pieces of iron hoops, bracelets of beads, and other trifles, for oxen, and hairy fat-tailed sheep of exceeding good flesh. By the river side they felled some high trees, which they floated down to their ships; out of these they shaped a new mast, refitted their spars, and repaired their vessel. They then set off by Mozambique, avoiding the Portuguese settlements, never touching anywhere till they saw the high land of Socotora. Here they were courteously received by the native Sheikh, who, however, charged them for everything, even for fresh water. He warned them against going to Aden, where there was now scarcely any trade, though the Governor was sure to exact heavy duties if they entered the port. He advised them to make for Surat, which was now under the power of the Great Mogul, Sultan of India, who was friendly to strangers, was willing to trade with the Franks, and would protect them against the Portuguese, who were hated everywhere. After staying for a week at Socotora, taking advantage of a favourable wind, they bore away with an Arab pilot on board to seek the shores of India. Here the captain felt his anxieties much increased, for he knew well that the Portuguese, who possessed many harbours along the coast, would do their best that he should never return from an attempt to trade in seas in which they so long enjoyed so gainful a monopoly.

It was now about the middle of March. They had neared the coast of Guzerat, and the faint outline of the

land could just be distinguished from clouds by the keen sight of the sailors. The wind, which was blowing their way, gradually lulled, and in about half-an-hour the *Unicorn* lay rocking gently upon the sea with all her sails set. The sailors soon tired of gazing at the distant land, and sat down to talk with one another, or lay down to sleep, for the heat and languor of the day disposed them to seek repose rather than amusement. Upon the quarter-deck two figures might be seen keeping within the shadow of the sails to avoid the sun, and conversing earnestly. The elder of the two, Captain Edward Hawkhurst, was a man about middle height, powerfully made, with a massive chest, deep voice, and firm step. He had brown hair, with a beard of lighter colour. In his hazel eyes there was that far-sighted look characteristic of the navigator. His whole air suggested the habit of watchfulness, and the sense of command. He wore a high peaked hat, round which was fastened a golden chain. He was dressed in a dark blue doublet, with sleeves and hose of the same colour, grey stockings, and boots which came a little above the ankles. From his white strap belt hung a short straight sword in a plain black scabbard, but with a gay hilt in gold work, set with a few jewels, the prize of an old sea fight. The other figure was a younger man, taller, and of a more slender make. He wore a round felt hat with upturned brim, under which clustered thick locks of dark brown hair. His dress consisted of a long buff doublet, with sleeves having laces or points showing the white cambric shirt underneath. The upper hose

were met below the knee with bluish stockings, and his feet were half-encased in loose buff slippers. He bore neither belt nor weapon. There was a thoughtful expression on his face and dark grey eyes under the well-defined ridge of his dark eyebrows. His complexion was more delicate than that of his companion, as if he had been less exposed to wind and weather. He had moustaches, but no beard. His hands were of remarkably fine shape. Altogether, he had an upright carriage, was alert and quick in his movements, but listened attentively without any eagerness to reply. This was Master Stephen Ashbourne, who, as already said, was in charge of the cargo of the ship.

Let us listen to the conversation of these two personages.

"How long think you this calm will last?" asked Ashbourne.

"I know not," answered the captain, "it may last days or last hours. Only you can have no practice in gunnery now. I wish that this Moorish pilot of ours had not brought us so near the coast. There is peril of our being seen by passing boats, when the news of a strange sail in these seas will be borne to Diu, which we must pass to get into the bay of Cambay."

"I have read," said the other, "of the King of Cambay who so inured himself to poisons, that he hath but to blow upon men, that they fall down dead; and no fly will light upon his body."

"Belike if he could have done so, he would have blown the Portuguese out of his lands," answered the

captain ; “these are but fables forged to frighten away voyagers from this coast. They say that the smaller kings are all afraid of the Portuguese, who levy duty upon their trading ships ; but if we get safe into Surat, we shall be under the protection of the Great Prince, who ruleth over Hindostan from the Indus to the Ganges. There you can sell your wares, and take in a cargo of cotton stuffs, and indigo, which, when we get back to England, will repay our loss and risk.”

“I can think of nothing,” said Ashbourne, “save the longing to see this wonderful land of India, of which I have read in Arrian and Quintus Curtius. Surely this calm will pass away ; but what will you do should we meet with some Portuguese ships to bar the way ? Do you mean to fight them ?”

“Not if I can help it,” replied the captain, “but we may have some shots in passing. Thanks to the good training you have given our men the time we were becalmed, our crew can work the guns as well as any. I have seen you make so many good shots at a butt, that I should like to see if you can hit the hull of a ship.”

“There is all the more safety being ready,” replied Ashbourne, “so with your leave I shall see that all the ordnance is in a good state, so that we may be able to hold our own.”

Ashbourne had through the desire of youthful adventure served in the wars of the Low Countries, where he had gained great reputation as a marksman with cannon. It was agreed in case of attack, he should act as master gunner. Their anxiety about the calm was not destined

to last long. In about an hour the breeze revived, soon strengthening into a brisk gale which bore the ship before it at a rapid rate. The dull languor of the crew passed away for an eager look and high spirits, from the increased coolness and rapid change of the air. Everyone began to talk of being speedily in port, when notice was given that a large ship was coming in sight from the seaward side. In a short time they were able to make out that she was a ship of European build, veering towards them from the south-west. After running for about an hour the two ships got near enough to be able to ascertain each other's character. The stranger was soon made out to be "a Portingal," a large carrack of about thirteen hundred tons, which the captain judged had been sent to cruise about for the English ship. There was no dubiety about her intentions from the beginning, for as she came nearer, they saw the flash of her guns, and a few seconds later the boom of cannon reached the ears of the crew of the *Unicorn*. But all the balls fell short, striking across the crest of the waves.

"She is out of range yet," said Ashbourne.

The *Unicorn* kept straight on her course, while the carrack, which was somewhat ahead, advanced towards her in a slanting direction. When he judged the Portuguese ship near enough, Ashbourne himself pointed the seven guns, which were fired one by one. The first two did not hit, but the third struck the hull of the carrack ; then getting into range, the master gunner made a number of shots which were hailed with

approbation by the veteran captain. Getting still nearer, the Portuguese returned the fire from a large broadside of guns, but without doing much damage to the *Unicorn*, which was lower in the water, and being of smaller size, was not nearly such a good mark as the towering mass of the carrack. Probably easy victories over inferior foes had rendered the Portuguese less attentive to keep up their old reputation for skill in seamanship, for though they fired three to one for the English ship, their shots did much less harm. When they were within arquebuse shot of one another, the Portuguese called on them to surrender, calling them at the same time "pirates and heretics" (*piratas, hereges*), and other abusive names. Though understanding the general import of these terms, Captain Hawkhurst did not take any trouble to return a reply.

"Their guns are much higher placed than ours. I think I can run our ship so near, that they will not be able to bend them to our deck, and then you know what to do."

Accordingly he ran his ship so near, that the Portuguese evidently thought that the English intended to board the carrack, but Hawkhurst let her drive past the *Unicorn*, and then his sailors fired their broadside into her hull, and passing her starboard side, were ready with another volley from their own larboard guns, which were now fired for the first time. For this manœuvre the Portuguese were unready. The Englishmen's guns told with effect upon the carrack and her crew, as they judged from the cries and confusion on board. But

without trying to improve his advantage, Hawkhurst made his ship to hold on her onward course.

The master gunner, who was much pleased at the success of his fire, now ran in a state of some excitement up to the master of the ship.

"Surely, captain, you are not going to pass the Portingal? I make no doubt that we are able to sink her, or force her to render."

"That may be," said the captain, "but I have already told you the *Unicorn* is for trade, and not for fighting. We are now fairly past her, and the carrack has got more than she gave. I think she will have to stop a leak. If it had been nearer home, she would not have got off so easily, but, as we are, I cannot risk getting my ship disabled."

In spite of the ill humour of the crew, Captain Hawkhurst bore his ship away from the carrack, which made small show of pursuing. He found that they had lost two killed, and five wounded. The sun, which was getting low during this exciting contest, sunk in a few minutes with a rapidity not known over northern seas. The *Unicorn* held on her course, passing within sight of Diu very early in the morning, and about seven o'clock in the evening they stood about a league south of the bar of Surat, where they saw three native ships riding at anchor. The next morning they passed a small Portuguese frigate, which was lying ready to take tolls and give passports to the native ships, which did not dare to venture out to sea without their licence. Apparently taken by surprise the Portuguese contented

themselves with shouting something to which no heed was paid. The green line of the shore came nearer and nearer, till the crew could see the strange forms of the palm trees and the broad leaves of the bananas, with strange buildings, mosques, pagodas, and lowly thatched houses half buried amongst the foliage.

About noon the *Unicorn* glided amongst the shipping which crowded the river Tapti, crafts of many a strange pattern, large open boats with short decks aft, covering a tiny cabin, flat-bottomed boats that had rubbed the yellow mud of the Indus, dhows from the Red Sea, high at the stern, with lateen sails and smelling strong of fish. There were even Chinese junks with covered decks. Amongst the crews were men of all races from the coasts of India, Arabia, and Africa, Arabs, Persians, Somalis, Negroes, Ceylonese, Malays, with a predominance of native Indians, who, with white cloths round their heads, but scarcely any clothing on their bodies, rowed about in their small boats amongst the larger vessels. It was not without a feeling of awe and loneliness that the English crew stared upon the unwonted figures, people of strange thoughts and strange ways. Nevertheless they were not without some kind of communion, for their Arab pilot lost no time in giving a glowing account of the affray with the carrack, which was soon swelled into a glorious victory over the hated Portuguese, and noised with all sorts of exaggerations and inventions through the fleet of trading vessels that lay off the port of Surat.

The captain of the ship, who in a voyage to the

Levant had learned something of the manners of the East, lost no time in trying to open parley with the Mussulman Governor of Surat. The Portuguese functionary at Surat, who looked after the interests of his countrymen, on his part, lost no time in attempting to bring the newcomers into discredit. He went to the governor and declared that he was incurring the risk of war with the Portuguese by receiving and sheltering their enemies, that the English were no better than pirates, who had only a part of a miserable island principally inhabited by fishermen, and that they had nothing to offer for trade save what they had gained by plunder. Perhaps the very bitterness of their hostility prejudiced their case in the mind of the governor. At any rate, after two days he sent word that he would grant the Feringhi captain an audience, received the letter from Queen Elizabeth, which he promised to send to his prince, and accepted with much benignity the present the captain brought with him, which consisted of a case of knives, two looking-glasses, and an arquebuse.

CHAPTER II.

TROUBLES ON SHORE.

THE governor assigned them an interpreter, through whom he sent word of what the Portuguese had said against their country. The Portuguese did their best to frighten all the merchants against having any traffic with the newcomers; and the interpreter on his side showed an evident desire to make himself the vehicle of all dealings with the natives of the country, as was shrewdly suspected with a view to his own private advantage. At first they were cheated without mercy, the people supplying them with bad provisions of every kind, stale fish, lean and flabby mutton, and rice which the poorest native would have refused to eat. But in less than a week they began to feel their way. A Venetian merchant, Paolo Vignali, came secretly on board, and gave them some advice and assistance. They were able to hire a native cook, who called himself a Christian of St. Thomas, and complained of the oppression of the Portuguese. This man was made use of to buy provisions, and in a few days, after a good deal of finesse with the native merchants, they began

to dispose of their cargo in a profitable way. Ashbourne applied his mind to frame a vocabulary of the language, and to make out a list of prices, which, in the East, is always a perplexing task.

Three of the sailors frolicking on shore had got into a scrape from loosing a monkey that was chained at a Hindu temple. They were mobbed by the people, and might have fared badly, but for the interposition of a European in a clerical habit, who managed to appease the crowd and get the sailors off to their ship. Soon after, this person called upon the captain. He turned out to be a Jesuit priest, Jacobus Cynus, otherwise Jacob Schwann of Trarbach, a fair-haired, broad-chested German, with an open and good-humoured expression. The captain received him somewhat surlily, but the priest's friendly manner and offers of service in the end so far gained over him, that Hawkhurst began to regard him as an acquaintance who might be useful.

Though men are never beyond the reach of misfortune, they are generally ignorant whence it will arise, and so it was with this adventurous crew. They had surmounted all the dangers of the deep to meet with disaster after they were safe in port.

One day, about noon, the butler of the ship took the native cook with him to pump some brandy from a cask to distribute next day to the crew. It being dark below, they took with them a small native earthen lamp, which was put upon a barrel higher up. A spark from the wick fell upon the cask of brandy, setting fire to some of the spirit which had been spilt. The blue

flame immediately ran along to the bunghole and lighted the brandy in the barrel. Such was the explosive force of the burning spirit, that it drove out the end of the barrel, and the flaming liquid swam about, carrying fire with it. The terrified native fled up the ladder, followed by the butler, who ran for water. The other seamen, coming to his assistance, poured a great many bucketfuls of water on the place, and they flattered themselves that the mischief was over. The captain was on shore at the time. When he returned about an hour after, they assured him that the fire was extinguished. He at once went down to the hold, from which smoke was beginning to come. Some of the burning liquid had run through the tiers of barrels and non-inflammable goods in the hold, and had set fire to some coals which lay in the very bottom of the ship. The captain made them pull away the barrels and other ware to try to reach the place. The fire, however, gained quickly, and sent up such a thick smoke that they were at length driven out to save themselves from being suffocated, when all they could do was to throw water into the hold. The fire soon gained a barrel of oil, which floated upon the top of the water. The ships and boats round about kept away from the burning vessel, fearing that she would explode ; but, as they were still able to reach the room where the powder was kept, the captain made the powder barrels be thrown out ere the fire could gain the place. For some time they thought that they were getting the fire under, but it again appearing to spread, the captain

sent out the carpenters to pierce holes in the sides of the ship with wimbles, so as to let in a fathom of water into the hold. It was found difficult to make the holes, and, when they were pierced, the water came too late, for the fire had gained the upper portions of the ship. At first the captain, dreading treachery and theft, was not willing to allow any strangers on board. After a struggle, lasting for about twelve hours, seeing that the fire had fairly got hold of the ship, they were glad to take what help they could get from the native porters and boatmen around, and tried to save what they could of their valuables, goods, and moveable articles.

Ere the night passed away, the crew saw the ship which had borne them from sight of their own homes round the Cape to India, burnt to the water's edge. It was the only trace of home, the oak which was grown in England, the familiar walls and furniture of their floating home, the spars they had spliced after a storm, the old sails—all which rendered the land less strange, the good ship, which had gone with them, and which they hoped would bear them back to old England, had now disappeared into smoke and cinders.

The painful necessity of their situation drove them to do something. While the captain and sailors set to to collect and guard the property which had been rescued, Ashbourne with the interpreter set off to see the governor, and ask some shelter for the crew thus deprived of their dwelling-place. The governor appeared to compassionate their condition, and assigned them an old serai where they might dwell till they got

better lodgings. He promised them some bullock waggons to carry away their goods, which, however, did not appear until next day. The crew passed the day under some tents hastily made with sail cloths, keeping close watch over their goods. They were glad to get into the serai, which was about a mile out of the town. They cleared out the rubbish in the serai and stored their goods, and established themselves in the little rooms or cells used for travellers, and then had time to consider what next to do. They were inclined to attribute their misfortune to the malice of the Portuguese. The native cook, the author of the fire, had disappeared, and was nowhere to be found. It was even said that the fire had appeared in another part of the ship before it could have spread from the hold. In short, some of the crew at least believed that the thing did not happen accidentally, that the man was an incendiary sent by the Portuguese to set fire to the vessel. The crew had seen some Portuguese watching their plight upon the shore with unconcealed glee, and, on the third day after their misfortune, while the captain with a young lad was walking by the shore, he was set upon by a Portuguese dignitary, who broke out into insulting expressions against the English. Hawkhurst declared that he would not dare to make good what he had said with his sword, on which the Portuguese immediately drew his weapon; and, two fellows who were with him, dressed in buff doublets, and apparently ready for mischief, whipped out their rapiers and set upon the captain, who had nothing but a cutlass to

defend himself withal. He would soon have been killed, had he not got into a boat which was lying a few yards off. Seizing one of the oars, he managed to keep off his mounted assailants by striking their horses whenever they tried to come near him. He gave one of the riders a severe blow on the left shoulder; the Portuguese were furious, and seemed bent on having his heart's blood. Luckily, the youth who was with the captain, having only a staff, had judged it best to run away; he soon appeared to the rescue with half-a-dozen of the English sailors. Two of the gallants made sharp off, but the third was seized and pulled from his horse. It was scarcely to be expected that the captain, in the heated state of his blood, should interfere before the Portingal had half his clothes torn off his back, and got cudgelled till he deemed it prudent to counterfeit being dead, nor was it at all to be wondered at that the Portuguese officer, Don Balthasar de Freytas, should go to the governor with an artful complaint against the English, who, taking foul advantage of superior numbers, had set upon him and his men. He threatened that if the enemies of his king were harboured any longer, the posts should be blockaded. His insolence was increased by the appearance of two Portuguese frigates off the bar. Hospitality is both a boast and a virtue with the Mussulman, but the governor had very powerful reasons for keeping on good terms with the Portuguese. He sent a message to the English to keep guard and be ready against a sudden attack, advising them at the same time to buy a ship to return to their

own country. They got help to repair the serai, and placed some of the guns they had brought from the ship.

It may be here explained to some of our readers that a serai is a square building enclosing a courtyard, with a well in the middle, and a round tower at each angle. Between the four towers are rows of little rooms with loopholed windows. The roof is flat, and there is only one entrance. It is therefore highly defensible. In the round chamber of the most habitable of the towers, decked up with some of the rescued furniture of his cabin, sat Captain Hawkhurst, with Master Stephen Ashbourne in earnest conversation.

"I do not know," said the captain, "whether we could raise money to buy and victual a ship, and the Portuguese frigates would be after us ere we were out of the road of Swally. Even if we escaped them, the best of these Indian crafts would go to pieces ere we could round the Cape. But if we stay long here we shall soon spend all that we have left. I would that we had word of the Dutch fleet of eight ships which sailed three months before us."

"From what I could learn," replied Ashbourne, "they have gone to the Spice Islands. Is there no island in the Indian Seas on which we could settle?"

"In truth, I know not what to do," went on the captain, paying no regard to this suggestion, but gazing into the distance as if searching for something.

"Can you devise nothing, Master Ashbourne, so that we may get back to England?"

“I do not wish to go back,” replied the other. “I have spent all my substance in this venture, and do not care to go back to London to face those who have lost by our misfortune. People used to say of me that I was born under an unlucky star, and now I have come to believe it myself. I think I must have brought ill luck upon you and the ship.”

“I much misdoubt,” said the captain, “whether men ever know what is to befall them. I once knew a man who thought that his hour was come. I think he was unhappy, whether through misfortune or guilt. He went into a fight we had in the West Indies with the Spaniards, one might say, seeking to be killed, yet neither lead nor steel touched him, and at night he joined in our carouse, swearing to laugh at all such evil bodings for the future. I heard that when he got home he was stabbed in a chance brawl in a tavern, just as our ship, after escaping the storm off the Cape, and the fight with the carrack, was burned in the harbour by chance or treachery. I once asked an astrologer, who told me that I would escape all the perils of the sea and die on shore. It seems to me that a way will be opened for us again to get home, when you will be glad to see your brothers in their quiet house and orchard in the Strand.”

“I never had much peace in my grandfather’s house after my uncle died,” replied Ashbourne; “my grandfather was not pleased that I could neither settle to trade nor to letters. What my uncle taught me of old times only made me discontented with our own. Of

what the moderns have written, the 'Utopia' of Sir Thomas More was what I liked best to read. I have often longed to see this grand and beautiful East which is open to us in the books of the Old Testament, and would fain see something more of it than this dirty Surat, and the shipping on the Tapti. They say that there are grand cities in India, and beautiful groves of old trees, and rare castles and houses."

"You are book-learned, Master Ashbourne," answered the captain, "and wish to see what you have read of. But I am a seafaring man, and would get troubled if out of sight of the coast."

They consulted together anxiously without being able to come to any conclusion. Two days after the captain was seized with a sudden illness. A strong man, scarcely ever ill, who had surmounted great dangers and fatigues, he could not believe such weakness could come upon him so soon. His limbs became cold and clammy. He was griped with internal pain and sickness. He struggled to rise from his bed, and fell back as if made of lead. His arm seemed too weighty to lift. It was not poison, as every one suspected, but a disease described by Garcia d'Acorta, a physician of Goa, in the first book ever printed in India—*mordechi, hachaiza, cholera*, which had lighted upon its first victim that came from English shores. In twenty hours Captain Hawkhurst was dead. Three of the crew were seized a few days after of the same malady, two of whom died. The sailors were now convinced that they had been poisoned. Suspicion fell upon the

German priest, though there was no way of showing how he could have tampered with their food or water. When he tried to renew his visit to the serai he was roughly turned back. Accustomed to be guided by the captain, and having great confidence in his resources, the English crew had trusted that he would find some means of getting them out of their difficulties ; but now they began to ponder over their forlorn situation. The mate who, though a good seaman, had no skill in dealing with the Indians, was disposed to leave everything to Ashbourne, who was thus obliged to take the lead. He found a friend in the commandant of the fort at Surat. His name was Lasker Khan. He assured them that the Portuguese had offered the governor 20,000 reals if he could get Ashbourne and the mate out of the way, or delivered up to them, when they trusted that they would ensnare the sailors. Ashbourne thanked the Mogul chief, and asked him what counsel he could give to help them out of their uneasy situation. The Mussulman listened with great attention to Ashbourne's explanation, and then stroking his beard, delivered his opinion through the interpreter.

“My son, your misfortunes give me the greatest pain. Of all men who dwell in the world these Portuguese are the worst, but we are not as yet able to cope with them on the sea. Take this, my advice. Do not try to return to your own country in a ship. If you cannot go by the dry road, put yourself under the protection of our Badsha, the Lord of the Ascendant, the Great Akber. He is now going with his army to conquer the

rajahs of the South. An order has come to me to join him with what force I can gather, which will be useful in besieging fortresses. Let your men take service with him, and I shall lead you to his camp. You understand how to handle cannon, and above all things the Badsha desires good artillerymen. It is my hope that, having reduced the idolators to obedience, he will take Goa and Diu, and drive the Portuguese dogs from the shores of India. As Akber is generous and wise, he will both pay you well, and find means of sending you back to your country."

This proposal seemed to Ashbourne a desirable way out of a disagreeable position ; but he was not sure that the crew would regard it in the same light. Being able to offer liberal pay, he did his best to show the proposal in a good light to the sailors. They entered into it with the thoughtlessness of their class, all save the mate and three others, one of whom had not yet recovered from a wound which he got in the action with the carrack. These four determined to stick to Surat till they could get a ship to take them to Europe. The cargo saved from the fire was left in the mate's hands.

The governor promised to take him and the three sailors under his protection. Ashbourne wrote a letter to his friends in London relating what had befallen them. This he committed to the Venetian merchant, Paolo Vignali, who undertook to send it to some one in Aleppo by the Red Sea. Stephen Ashbourne and his

recruits now changed what silver money they had into gold pieces. Lasker Khan supplied them with some clothes and arms, and in a few days they were ready to march. After all their losses they were still sixty-eight in number.

CHAPTER III.

TREATS OF STEPHEN ASHBOURNE'S EARLY LIFE, TASTES, AND TENDENCIES.

THE events of a few days had thus changed Stephen Ashbourne from a ruined merchant into an artillery officer in the service of Akber. Both his innate disposition and the circumstances of his education had joined to make Ashbourne out of unison with the pattern then approved of in his country during Elizabethan times. His father had died when a young man, leaving three sons, Stephen the youngest being then five years of age. His mother died at his birth. He had thus fallen to the care of his grandfather, after whom he had been named. Stephen the elder, a man of a morose and unsociable disposition, was reputed to be attached to the old religion. Being possessed of intelligence and industry he had gradually shifted his business from a lapidary to a jeweller and goldsmith, and was believed to be possessed of much wealth. The old Stephen Ashbourne had a surviving son who had been lamed by some accident in youth. Of delicate health, and retiring and studious habits, he

lived with his father, keeping his accounts, and conducting his correspondence.

Richard Ashbourne was a scholar of some pretensions to learning, and took special care of the education of his nephews. It was understood that he jarred with his father in his religious views, and favoured the heresy of the Anabaptists. In these discordant surroundings Stephen Ashbourne was reared. Without a mother's care, his wants supplied, though coldly and without tenderness, in a home where there was distrust of the outer world, with little agreement within, poorly dressed, but well educated, the boy grew up with many susceptibilities uncultivated, and some a little distorted.

In those times in which feudal notions were still strong, and the arts of peace thought beneath those of war, traders were not held in much esteem by the higher orders; but in London they formed a class sufficiently numerous, rich, and independent to have an atmosphere of their own, in which they might live contentedly. Brought up in his grandfather's trade, which dealt with the wealthy and ostentatious, young Stephen had to go about to the houses of the nobility to exhibit jewellery. In this occupation, he was often treated with scant ceremony.

Had his mind acquiesced in the views of subordination of rank then prevalent, he might have become callous instead of irritable; but he had, by natural disposition and education, received ideas of equality and the dignity of man which were, like most abstract ideas, difficult to sustain in real life. His mind had taken in

much that he had read of ancient learning, of the writings of the sages and historians of the great republics of antiquity. Like many young men in every age he was filled with a keen sense of the injustice of the world. This hatred of injustice may become a dangerous susceptibility, for people must expect both to suffer and to witness much injustice on this earth as well as pain and grief, and if they cannot steel their hearts to iniquity, it may drive them well-nigh insane; sometimes, indeed, it does drive men insane. The times were still hard against a man who did not conform to their patterns. Sixty years after this Ashbourne might have found friends at the Rota Club. In those days it was well for him that he had the sense to keep many of his ideas to himself. Stephen had an uncle on his mother's side, who lived on his own land near Dartford. Amongst five daughters, there was one about his own age, a cheerful maiden with soft blue eyes, and a disposition which led her early to look to men as natural admirers, and possible husbands. Stephen Ashbourne, who was always kindly received at the pretty two-storied thatched house amongst the trees, fell in love with the fair maid of Kent without any misgiving, devoted himself for years to her, and assumed the same fidelity on her part. In vain, for a neighbouring proprietor, who wrote himself gentleman, asked the hand of the maiden, which was accorded to him by her father, with much satisfaction, and no apparent reluctance from her. To Ashbourne this seemed vile faithlessness and utter profanation, for the successful suitor was a widower so advanced in years

that Ashbourne could venture to call him old. The truth is that, ignorant of women, from the way he had been brought up, he had fallen in love with a girl of no depth of character, who took a matter-of-fact view of life. His imagination had invested her with a deep glow of amiable qualities, of which she only possessed a feeble outline. He spoke to no one of it, but vowed that since he had learned what deep pain a woman might lightly cause, he would never again give another woman the chance to wound him, and this resolution he kept for years, during which he quietly avoided the society of women.

In human life men cannot escape being now and then thrown into situations mortifying to their self love. This is especially felt by young people who wish to acquire a character, and who are sensitive to ridicule. Once Stephen was sent to a great nobleman to exhibit some jewellery. When the earl had inspected his wares and bought something, the young man found a ring of some value was wanting, and he asked for it. The earl said he had it not, and hastily told him to begone. Stephen said he could not go till he had some account of the ring. From an altercation it passed into a dispute, when the earl ordered his servants to turn the young man out, which they did with some violence. Stephen demanded justice, but no one would take up his case as it was not clear, and the nobleman had great power. The ring had dropped on the floor, and lay some days amongst the rushes till it was found. It is a feature of human nature that men will do many mean

things rather than acknowledge themselves in the wrong. Instead of making an apology, his lordship caused the ring to be wrapped up, and sent one of his servants to throw it into the jeweller's shop, and then to make off. When the ring was picked up no explanation was forthcoming. This led to reflections and doubts, which our friend resented angrily. The whole thing wisely looked at was a trifle, but great irritation often comes from trifles. Stephen could not be brought to think the matter of no moment, and thought his friends were slack or treacherous in not taking his part more warmly.

This led the young man to leave his home precipitately, and take service in the wars of the Low Countries. Here he fared better than might have been expected. He fell in with an old friend of his family, who commanded a battery of artillery. Under his care the young adventurer soon showed a remarkable skill in handling cannon, and learnt by rough practice the method of attacking and defending strong places. After about two years' service, Stephen was again landed in London, in very poor health. He had been overturned with an artillery waggon, when his left arm was broken, and several of his ribs. He found both his grandfather and uncle dead. His brothers assured him that the old man had left much less than they expected. It was thought that he must have had both money and jewels hid in some secret place, which they could not find out. Stephen was not satisfied with these statements, and the result was a quarrel between him and

his elder brothers, which perhaps he would have sustained with greater vigour had he been confident that he would long enjoy the portion he actually received. Troubled with a harassing cough, he welcomed the idea of seeking a warmer climate, and left his own country with a feeling of disgust and disappointment.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE MOGUL'S CAMP.

IT was agreed that Lasker Khan's force should first be marched on in detachments, and that the English should set out about two hours before sunrise, as the increasing heat of the season now caused them distress. The Mogul chief promised that he would convoy them. Himself a veteran soldier, he seemed somewhat amused when at the appointed time, by the light of a few torches made with linen rags steeped in oil, carried at the end of a stick, he saw in front of the serai the English sailors ranked up in a line, presenting a motley appearance, some with guns, some with spears, half-a-dozen bearing the long bow with quivers full of arrows. They were all armed with cutlasses, and most of them had white pugaries round their hats. Lasker Khan himself was gallantly armed with sword, spear, shield, and matchlock, and mounted on a fine grey Arab horse, with saddle covered by a tiger skin. A real Mogul, he was short-faced, with prominent cheek-bones, a fairer complexion than the native Indians, with broad shoulders, deep chest, and muscular limbs. He had

with him about sixty horsemen, and double that number of foot soldiers. They brought some bullock carts to carry the sailors' baggage, and gave Ashbourne five horses. Some of the sailors also had ponies, and the rest went on foot. They trudged silently along the dark and dusty road. It was now the beginning of May, and the hot season had commenced, but the first rays of the sun were not too powerful to prevent them welcoming the presence of light. They found themselves in a well-peopled and well-cultivated country; every cottage had its little garden, enclosed in its bamboo fence, and shaded with banana and guava trees. The tall euphorbia hedges, the deep shade of the mango and banyan trees, and the elegant and novel forms of different species of palm, attracted the wondering notice of the seamen, who had never before ventured to ramble much beyond the dusty bazaars of Surat. In India, Nature is always ready to throw a cloak over human art. The mud or reed houses of the villagers appeared half-hidden amongst the luxuriant vegetation. The ever-increasing heat soon rendered them indifferent to the objects around. Exhausted with fatigue, parched with thirst, choking with dust, and half-stupefied with the heat and glare of the sun, they toiled painfully on, till they reached the halting place, which was nearly twenty miles from Surat. Several little rooms with mud walls were allotted to them for their shelter. They eagerly drank the water which was drawn from the deep and shaded well, but the escort who accompanied them found much difficulty in procuring them

food which they could eat. Sick with the heat, the men turned away from the unleavened flour cakes which were offered them. It was with difficulty that they procured some goat's flesh, which they got cooked with rice.

Next morning they resumed their march. The heat during the day was very annoying, but the seamen were pleased with the novel sights they saw, and the great deference which was shown to them by the natives. Naturally, taking their tone from Lasker Khan's horsemen, they began to feel that they could obtain more things without paying for them from the villagers, than might have been accorded to men with no arms in their hands.

After a fortnight's marching, they joined a considerable force which was besieging a steep hill fort called Jamud. Next day Lasker Khan took Ashbourne with the interpreter to the general's tent. This was Abul Fazl, one of the principal of Akber's grandees. They found him sitting on a mat, dictating to his secretary. He was an elderly man, tall and finely made, with an oval face, long nose, and grave and thoughtful countenance. He received Ashbourne with much distinction, and invited him to dine with him. A surprising variety of rich dishes were served in a wide tent. His son, Abdurrahman, acted as *safarchi*, or head butler. Abul Fazl, who amongst other things was celebrated for his appetite, encouraged every one to eat heartily, and set the example. In a neighbouring tent, all comers, rich and poor, might dine. Abul Fazl asked

the Englishman whether he understood artillery better than any other branch of the military art. Abul Fazl then explained, through a drawing, their position, and that of the town they were attacking, which was the stronghold of a Hindu Rana, situated on a steep hill. They had placed some guns upon a ridge near the town, but without being able to do much harm to the defenders. He desired Ashbourne to go thither and ascertain whether he could make anything of it. Ashbourne went at once with his men. He found the distance between the ridge and the town to be considerable, but still within range.

The native gunners had not been attentive to using an unvarying quantity of gunpowder in loading, and even used bullets of different kinds and weight. Ashbourne insisted on having measured cartridges, and bullets of one size. He got the batteries shifted to the edge of the ridge, and protected with fascines, and when he commenced, most of his round shot fell within the town. He aimed especially at the high balconies, towers, and other fragile buildings, the fragments of which, falling far and near, caused much alarm amongst the people who had crowded for refuge into the town. Abul Fazl increased the consternation by sending a spy into the fort, who reported that the Badsha himself was coming with his whole army to reduce the place. The defenders, becoming suddenly dispirited, offered to surrender the place, if allowed to leave with what moveable property they could carry with them, to which the Mogul general agreed.

After two days, Abul Fazl, leaving a garrison in the town, marched off to join the main army, which was besieging the city of Ahmadnagar. During the march, Abul Fazl had much intercourse with Ashbourne, and asked him many questions, for not only was he a general, but a man of great learning, and of boundless curiosity, and the author of many books on history and kindred matters, which are still read in India, where he is known as the Great Munshi.

There were signs enough that they were getting near the besieged city. The roads, worn with deep ruts of wheels, were full of people, generally in bands, whilst the country about was deserted.

Bullock-waggons laden with grain, strings of camels toiling under their loads, squalid-looking men, almost naked, with loads of grass upon their heads, or boxes balanced on each end of a pole, which they bore on their shoulders, parties of horsemen and foot-soldiers, passed or were left behind, or rested under the shade of wide-spreading trees. The villages on the road were deserted; the shells of the houses, with their burned and blackened roofs, and the gardens torn and ransacked, told in their mute way of the miseries of war. The very leaves of the banana trees were carried away to give food to the elephants and camels. The English crew, with the servants and followers who had already gathered round them, trudged wearily on.

On a sudden, from the turn of an eminence, the whole theatre of war came into view, a plain closed in on two

sides by hills, and traversed by the river Sina. On its left bank lay the city of Ahmadnagar, a dull mass of flat-roofed houses, built of mud-coloured bricks, surrounded by a mud wall with bastions here and there. To the east was seen the wide circle of the stone fort which the Moguls held besieged. Between Ashbourne's party and Ahmadnagar lay the great camp of the invading host, lighted by the rays of the setting sun, a city of canvas, miles in extent. The eye ran along rows of tents with open streets between leading into wider thoroughfares, all converging to the centre, where a large space of ground was enclosed by miniature walls of red canvas, with towers at regular intervals. The ground within this enclosure seemed to have been originally occupied by a garden, for there were regular clumps or avenues of trees, which broke the monotony of the rows of great tents of divers colours, principally green, white, and red. The largest of these pavilions, raised a few feet above the ground, were crowned with domes, and on the tops of the smaller tents, polished globes of copper and brass glistened in the sun. In the open ground, in front of the enclosure, there was a double line of dark moving masses, which they said were the elephants. As they neared the camp, they could distinguish the tents from the little reed huts or lowly awnings under which the servants and camp followers sheltered themselves from the sun. At intervals there were rows of shops full of goods, principally grain, fruit, and clothing. Horses tied by the heels stood in long rows opposite the tents of the cavalry. The sun set

before they passed through the camp on their way to the quarters assigned to them. Every one seemed engaged in cooking. The little fires they had kindled on the ground threw their light on the strange faces of the groups seated around, and then faded away amongst the darkness behind. They passed through a countless sea of people of strange tongue and foreign garb. Worn out and bewildered, they were much relieved when their guides at last brought them to the place destined for their lodgings.

Ashbourne was conducted with more ceremony than he relished into a wide tent of red canvas. The lining inside was adorned with chintz, figured with fruit and flowers, and the ground was covered with bright-coloured carpets. Dusky attendants brought him water to wash, and then another troop appeared with dishes of roasted meat, rice, and spices. To drink there was water and lemonade, cooled with saltpetre. Going to the tents of his men, he found that they had also been well treated. They had eaten heartily, had passed off their jokes upon their obsequious native attendants, and were grumbling like true Englishmen that there was neither wine nor beer, that there were no tables nor stools, and that they were served after an outlandish and heathenish fashion.

On looking out of the tent next morning, Stephen saw an open plain through the hazy light of the tropical morning, for they were on the extreme edge of the camp. Almost in a line with their tents there was a row of mud houses, near which was a small bell-shaped

Hindu temple, in front of which a Brahmin priest was performing adoration apparently to a large oval white stone. On Ashbourne approaching to watch him performing his ceremonies, the Brahmin seemed put about, and said something which Stephen understood to mean that he, too, gave worship to his own God; at the same time, the priest pointed repeatedly to the left. Being curious to know what he meant, Ashbourne went a few steps in that direction, when he saw a large and finely-decorated pavilion with a rounded door. Curiosity led him to push aside the curtain and look in, when, to his astonishment, he saw the interior of a gorgeous chapel in the well-known cross form. The walls were lined with tapestries and brocade, and the roof of blue silk was studded with golden stars. There was an altar and crucifix, with pictures of the Virgin and Child, the transfiguration, and other scenes of Christian history. The whole interior was lighted with many lamps of silver, hanging from the roof.

After looking about for a few minutes in wonder, he saw, approaching him, a dignified figure in the garb of a priest, on which Ashbourne, who felt that he was an intruder, slowly retreated to the door of the canvas chapel. The priest followed him, and addressed him in French, which Ashbourne understood, though somewhat imperfectly. On learning that he was an Englishman, he told him to wait. In a minute he returned with another priest, a younger man, whom, by his deferential manner, Ashbourne judged to be of an inferior rank. This newcomer at once addressed

Ashbourne in good English, though with a foreign accent, saying that he was welcome to come into the chapel to say his prayers whenever he wished, that it was a Christian church for the benefit of all who were of the true faith, or who might be turned to it by the Providence of God.

“I thank thee,” said Ashbourne; “but I am an Englishman, and belong not to the Roman persuasion. I wist not what your chapel was when I entered, so I pray thee to excuse me.”

“Indeed, I hope you will enter our chapel again, and as for being an Englishman, there be many good sons of the Church in England, and many willing to return to it, were it not for the cruelties of the law against the ancient faith, from which I have myself suffered in your country.”

“Belike you are one of the foreign priests,” said Ashbourne, “who have got into trouble for plots against our Queen. I and my mates have already suffered both from the hatred of the Portuguese and the craft of foreign priests, so I would as lief have no commerce with you.”

“As you please,” returned the priest; “none of us here have done you any wrong. We are not Portuguese, nor do we take part in the wars of the King of Spain. We are soldiers in a higher warfare, and would fain do our best for the souls of those who ignorantly think us their enemies.”

Ashbourne, who, it will be perceived, had something of the bluntness of his countrymen, turned away with-

out answering, when the priest said in an engaging manner, "You are a stranger here, and must find many things difficult. We are willing to help you in a friendly way."

"Pardon me," said Ashbourne, "but may I ask whom I am addressing, and how came you to be here in this camp of Moslems and idolaters?"

"This is the Father Jerome Xavier, and I am called Father Corsi," replied the priest.

Stephen could not repress an involuntary motion of reverence. He had heard of Francis Xavier, the apostle of the Indies, of his wonderful travels and hardships, his miracles, and his baptising whole towns in one day.

Father Corsi said in an affable manner that they had come to preach the gospel among the heathen, and that they had lived for several years at the court of the Mogul. Feeling somewhat ashamed at his bluntness, Ashbourne then explained how he and his crew had found their way into the camp, to which the priest ventured a gentle remonstrance.

"I am sorry that you have changed your trade from peaceful merchants and sailors to soldiers. What quarrel have you with the people of this part of India, that you should come to help the Mogul to enslave them and spoil their cities? This is not a country in which you can live and thrive. The air and water are as poison to those who have not been born in hot climates."

"It seems strange, learned Father," said Ashbourne, "that you who dwell in the Mogul's camp should seek

to warn men away from his service. We have had already the benefit of his protection against your friends the Portuguese, and should like to do the Mogul some service in return."

Stephen was irritated at the foreign priest, and yet his words found an echo in his conscience which troubled him. What, indeed, had he to do in this invasion of a country, where he had gone to trade? But circumstances had made him a soldier of fortune, and it was clear that, having entered the Mogul's camp, he could not go away without showing at least that the Englishmen could fight.

For two days they received no message from Abul Fazl; but their neighbours the Jesuits did not forget them. In the cool of the evening there appeared a dark-haired, active-looking man, well dressed in light clothes of European fashion, giving his name as Benedict de Gocs. He soon showed himself to be one of these unweariedly courteous and perseveringly presuming visitors, who will take neither rebuff nor denial, and in the end get within a man's guard unless he is in a mercilessly bad humour. Getting hold of the Fleming, Peter Gyzen, for interpreter, he told Ashbourne that he was a labourer belonging to the mission, and that he thought it was a special providence which led the Englishman's steps to the chapel that morning. Would the illustrious signor consent to listen to the story of his conversion? Perhaps it might be for his own salvation. Seeing no better way of spending the time Ashbourne assented in a somewhat ungracious

manner, which did not in the least damp the *bon-homme* of Benedict de Goes, who perseveringly infused his story through the interpreter in the following terms :—

“I was born at Villa Franca in the island of St. Michael, and went out to the Indies as a soldier. I was a thoughtless young man, and totally forgot my duty to God. I was fond of dissipation, and very much addicted to gambling. Being engaged in the wars of the coast of Malabar, I one day by chance found myself at the door of a church near Travancore. I entered through curiosity, crossed myself, and a ray of religious feeling entered my mind when I saw the altar and the picture of the holy Virgin with the child Jesus in her arms. I remembered the old chapel at Villa Franca, where my mother used to take me when a child, place me on my knees before the altar, and teach me to pray, and where I used to go with my sisters, when my father was struck down by a sore illness, to pray that he might be raised up again to work for us all. Well, but to go back to my story, I prostrated myself before the altar and began to pray, when, behold, suddenly the image of the little child Jesus in the arms of his mother commenced to weep, for I saw coming from his eyes a liquid, resembling milk, which trickled down in such abundance, that it bathed the whole altar. I marvelled much, and called my companions to be witness of the miracle, recounting everything to them. They too saw it clearly and distinctly, and took a piece of linen which they dipped in that liquid, and cutting it into pieces,

divided it amongst each other. We all showed the greatest joy for such a miracle, which we signalled by firing our cannon and spreading the floor of the church with branches of trees. I, myself, resolved to devote the remainder of my life to the conversion of the heathen, and have now spent twelve years in helping the mission, by all the humble means in my power."

Ashbourne was by no means carried away by the miracle, as Benedict de Goes seemed to expect. He had heard of the story of the Rood of Grace, the crucifix kept at Boxley in Kent. The image was believed to have a miraculous power of moving its head, lips, and eyes, till, at the suppression of the monasteries the secret springs and wheels were discovered, and the imposture publicly exposed at St. Paul's Cross. Ashbourne did not hesitate putting down the portent which had been the turning-point in the life of Benedict de Goes to the same class of pious frauds. Nevertheless he did not think the time opportune for stating the explanation to the Portuguese. He learned from the communicative brother of the mission that the Father Jerome Xavier was the nephew of the celebrated Francis Xavier whose body remained miraculously preserved at Goa, that the missionaries had been four years following the court of Akber, that they had been at Agra, Lahore, and Cashmere, that the fathers were in great favour with the emperor, who was no believer in the false prophet, and whom they hoped to be able to turn to the Christian faith, when he would probably be able to bring his whole kingdom with him.

Benedict said that when they were at Lahore some of the mosques had been turned by the emperor into stables and granaries, and to affront the Mussulmans, forty or fifty pigs were brought every Friday into the royal presence to fight. Ashbourne, though somewhat doubtful of all these strange news, judged that the Jesuits must have some influence at Court, and thought it would be prudent not to offend them.

Then Benedict de Goes, declining a little from his spiritual tone, asked the Englishman if he could play at cards or chess, and receiving a favourable answer, promised to supply him with these means of pleasurable intercourse, in default of oral conversation carried on at considerable difficulties.

CHAPTER V.

WAR, PLAY AND WINE.

ON the third day Abul Fazl sent for Ashbourne to come to his tent. Our hero felt much gratified when the sheikh asked him what he should advise towards reducing the fortress. The Prince Murad had besieged it several years before, but had been compelled to retire. The force now before Ahmadnagar was commanded by Prince Danyal Mirza. The Emperor Akber was now at Burhampur, directing the siege of Asir, a strong mountain fortress, which contained the long-hoarded treasures of the Kings of Candish. The city of Ahmadnagar had been abandoned as indefensible, but the principal inhabitants, with their moveable property, had taken refuge in the great stone fort to the east of the town. The defenders were held together by Chand Sultana, the aunt of the boy King, Bahadur Nizam Shah. Of this heroine the English crew had already heard something.

Ashbourne replied to the inquiries of Abul Fazl, that the only plan he could propose to take the fort, would be to silence the fire of the bastions on one side, and

then break down the wall by a breaching battery. Beyond this general advice he could not go unless he took a survey of the enemy's position, and knew the kind of artillery which he might have to handle.

Abul Fazl replied that it was likely that Prince Danyal would prefer to make a breach by mining. In any case, that it was necessary that the fire of the besiegers should be so kept under, that the Moguls could push their work far enough forward to run a mine under the wall. He took Ashbourne at once to the artillery park, where there was an imposing display of large cannon, principally of brass, admirably adapted to consume a great deal of powder and send large balls in unforeseen directions. Some of the more recent pieces of ordnance were much better made than the others, and from these, Ashbourne selected as many cannon as he could work with his crew, and the Indian gunners whom it was proposed to put under his directions. As no plan of attack had yet been sketched, Ashbourne was asked to get his men to construct a battery on the plain beyond the camp, and show their skill in gunnery by firing at a mark.

This Ashbourne did, all the more willingly as he saw the advantage of a rehearsal, for his men, though good gunners, required practice in siege works. With the help of a number of native assistants the battery was constructed, and they commenced to fire at a mark. Abul Fazl soon appeared with a dozen horsemen, who dismounted. One of them, a broad-shouldered man with fair complexion and searching black eyes, after

watching the firing for a little, took a gun and pointed it, making some good hits. One of the English gunners, Nicholas Hart, who was especially skilful, then fired at the mark, but missed it, upon which Abul Fazl said, "Surely you fired better at the Fort of Jamud."

"How can we use the guns well," said the man, "in this hot, dry country, when you give us no wine?"

Abul Fazl laughed, and some conversation passed between him and his followers. The gun practice went on, Ashbourne keeping a-head of the native artillerymen, but Nicholas Hart, gunner, continued to fire badly. In a short time a horseman came galloping up, bearing a flagon which was handed to Abul Fazl, who ordered a cup to be filled and handed to the gunner. It turned out to be wine. The man drank it off, and returned to the gun, instantly changing his method of firing, and making excellent shots. The flagon of wine was soon emptied by the other men, and Abul Fazl said, since it seemed that wine was as necessary as food to Englishmen, they should have a supply in future. This trick of the gunner very much raised his reputation amongst the rest of the crew. Abul Fazl then told Ashbourne that he would like him to come to make a survey of the fort, when he would get his opinion where the battery should be placed. They brought him a horse to ride upon. The saddle was high, both before and behind, with short stirrups, and the reins were all united into one thong, so that Ashbourne got on pretty well at first, but he was far from being a practised horseman, and the animal soon began to show an unruly and pugnacious disposi-

tion, trying to get up a fight with the horse of the man who rode nearest. Ashbourne struggled with the beast until he got so exhausted that he could hold it in no longer. It then rushed upon the other horse, trying to bite it, on which the man kept it off by striking it with the butt of a short arquebuse which he carried. One of the Hindustanis dismounted, and offered Stephen a quieter horse, which he was glad to accept. He felt ill at ease when he saw the Indian artilleryman dismount from his own horse, and leap upon the back of the unruly beast which he had just given up. His mortification was much increased when he noticed that after a few plungings and rearings, the unruly quadruped perceived that he had found his master, and went along quietly. Decidedly, thought Ashbourne, this man is a much better rider than I, if he cannot handle a gun so well. They made a circuit round the place, carefully surveying the fortifications. They were several times fired at from the walls, and one man and two horses were killed. Ashbourne saw that the besieged had some very heavy cannon, and that their artillery practice was not to be despised. Stephen did not much appreciate the reconnoitring party. Always anxious to retain his coolness of nerve, he disliked unnecessary bravado, and considered hand to hand conflicts quite beneath the dignity of an artilleryman.

He returned to his tent, and cooled himself by getting a goat's skin of water poured over him. Soon after, Benedict de Goes appeared, and challenged the Englishman to a game at chess, which they played

upon a board placed on a wicker stool outside. On looking up from his game Ashbourne perceived that a man was standing by, watching their play, and on looking at him attentively, he recognised the soldier who had handled the gun so well in the morning, and had ridden the unruly horse which he himself had been unable to manage. Somewhat resenting the intrusion, he contented himself with recognising the stranger's salute with a stiff nod. This seemed in no way to discompose the soldier, who said something to Benedict de Goes in the Hindi language, which Ashbourne did not understand. When their game was done, the Portuguese told Ashbourne that the stranger would like to have a game at chess with him. Without more ado the game commenced, when Ashbourne soon saw that the stranger was a much better player than himself, and although Benedict de Goes did his best to help him, in a short time he found himself checkmated. The stranger then withdrew, after courteously saluting the two Europeans, which Ashbourne returned stiffly, and the Portuguese with great ceremony. Almost immediately after, Benedict de Goes took his leave, when Ashbourne had leisure to watch the stranger, who strolled amongst the Englishmen with his nonchalant air, watching two or three who were practising with the bow. "He will ask to be allowed to shoot," thought Ashbourne, "but I doubt an English bow will be too tough for him." Accordingly, in a minute or two, he saw the curious stranger take the bow from the hands of the sailors, and bending it slowly he rested his eye

upon the point, and drew the arrow-head to the ear, and sent arrow after arrow at the target, which he hit every time. The sailors seemed somewhat surprised, and prepared to increase the range, but the stranger, with the same easy, disengaged air, after unbending the bow and examining it a little, turned away, and mounting his horse, which a man brought him, galloped off, followed by two other horsemen.

“Who is that man, I wonder,” said Ashbourne to Nicholas Hart.

“I know not, but it was he who told them to bring the wine this morning.”

In the meantime the stranger, galloping through the tented city, rode up to the wide square enclosure which shut in with its canvas screen the headquarter camp. In front of one side of the square there was an open space in which there were about fifty small pieces of horse artillery. In the middle of the enclosure was the gate, and on one side of this gate was a tent, in front of which some young Omrahs mounted guard. On the other side was a tent for the trumpeters. Every one made way for him as he rode in. He dismounted at the first tent, which was very large, the roof supported by painted pillars, and the walls lined with fine chintz, worked over with flowers of many kinds, relieved here and there with hangings of figured satin of various colours, or embroideries of silver and gold. The floor was covered with a splendid carpet, on which were placed square brocade cushions to sit upon. This was the *Am Khas*, or assembly room for the courtiers and

officers. Passing through a somewhat smaller tent, used for a more choice assembly, the stranger entered the council tent, from which he passed to a smaller one within an enclosure of screens, which was the sleeping-place of the Prince Danyal. There was an attendant at the door. He sternly pushed the man aside, and strode into the tent. The prince, a comely young man, was lying on a *charpai*, or cot bed, without any hangings, his sword, shield, matchlock, and other weapons leaning in one corner. The prince was lying on his back in a deeply somnolent condition. A boy was fanning the flies from his face. The visitor looked attentively at the prostrate figure, and then stirred him several times with his hand. The prince moved a little, opened his eyes for a moment, and then closed them. Then turning to the page, the stranger said, abruptly, "How long has he been in this state?"

"The prince gave a banquet last night, and has since slept," replied the attendant.

"Ah me!" said the stranger, whose identity the reader has perhaps guessed, "I am the ruler of Hindustan and Cabul, and have gained many battles and taken many cities, and some even foolishly say that I can work miracles. And this is my son, of the line of Timur, who will not be equal to his destiny. I send him in charge of a great army to besiege a fortress from which his brother was driven back by a woman, and now he makes himself worse than the stupidest bearer of burdens in the camp. The poorest sentinel caught sleeping at his post would suffer death;

but the general should watch when his soldiers sleep. He is hasting on the same road to destruction on which his brother Murad went before." Then walking hastily into the council tent, where half-a-dozen Mogul generals were already assembled, he cried out, "Come hither with me!" He led them to the prince's sleeping tent, and then said in a stern voice, "Can you do no more for me than this? Could you not watch better over my son than to let him thus stupefy his reason with wine? Is it thus he could direct the army under his commands, or did you sit drinking with him and suffer his drunkenness that you might command in his stead? Was there no way of saving me from this humiliation?"

Abul Fazl replied, "Truly, great king, this is a source of much grief to your faithful servants, but the young are prone, neglecting the excellent path pointed out by the wise, to seek a way for themselves. Being much occupied with arrangements about the fort I did not go to the banquet. But it is my hope that the prince will take more care in future, and attend to the advice your highness has given him, and keep clear of this liquid which men have learned to make in an unhappy hour, and which the men of Hindustan do not know, perhaps through want of habit, how to use properly."

"And is this all you have to say in excuse for yourselves?" cried Akber. "Could you who were present do nothing but talk of my advice? I have made you great commanders of men, and when I send you with

my son as his guides and counsellors, there is none of you ready even to warn me in time when he is wandering so far from the right path." He glared around as if seeking for some one. All the chiefs cast down their eyes with a deprecating look of sorrow, save a tall, powerful-looking, bearded Afghan, with a stern countenance and aquiline nose, wearing a large green turban, who gazed at the emperor, his frame trembling with emotion. This was Akber's foster-brother.

"And what have you to say, Aziz-gi?" said the emperor, looking fixedly at him.

"Ah, Badsha," replied the Afghan, "why do you blame your servants without reason? Think a moment. You have placed the prince, whose life be prosperous, over this army as its commander, and you speak as if we, his servants, could snatch from his lips the wine cup. Or can we, entering into his heart, give him the power of restraint? Will this lesson not teach you the wisdom of the prophet who forbade the faithful to taste the accursed drink? Why did you not bring up your son in the precepts of the Koran, and keep him away from those who have unlearned the faith of their fathers (looking at Abul Fazl), and the priests of the Nazarenes, who tempt men with the wine-cup to become the worshippers of a piece of bread. God has given you many good things, much power, and the knowledge of many things; but one thing he has denied you—the knowledge of the true God. Has the angel Gabriel brought you a book from heaven that you think of founding a new religion? You have

yourself been reared in the faith of Islam by the dweller in paradise, your father, the Emperor Humayum, and your mind has grown up in its precepts. But what has been sown in the prince's mind that you could expect any crop but weeds? Take warning by what has been. Let the law of the prophet rule in your camp, surround the prince with true believers, have in your mind the fear of eternal perdition. God allows you for a few days to be great amongst men, but do not despise His commands, for all the armies of India, Iran, and Turkestan could not save you a moment from His wrath. It is my constant prayer that Allah will soon pour His light upon you, when all the faithful will rejoice."

The silence with which this daring speech was listened to lasted for half-a-minute after Aziz Khan had ceased speaking, when Abul Fazl began an indignant protest against the presumptuous rudeness of the zealot, in which the others joined, only Akber was silent. The prince now opened his eyes, and stared vacantly at the assembly, while the Afghan stood like a bull in a corner, listening to the reproaches of the other chiefs. At last, with a sudden impulse, Aziz walked out of the tent without saying a word. "No living man," cried Akber, "would have dared to say this to me save the son of Atgah (foster-father) Khan. Between him and me there is a river of milk which I cannot cross. But," changing the subject with an effort, he continued, "we must now consider what is to be done that this should not take place again."

They returned to the council tent, where they remained about an hour. The emperor gave increased powers to Abul Fazl, and calling the different officers of the Court, he sternly told them that they would lose their heads if they were known to bring wine to the prince, or to assist him in getting any. He asked where the wine was, and directed all their store to be brought. He ordered the flagons to be shivered to pieces before him, and the wines of Europe and Shiraz sank into the ground.

It was only next morning that Ashbourne learnt from Benedict de Goes who his distinguished visitor was. "Why did you not tell me?" was the not unnatural question of the bewildered Englishman, who was afraid that his behaviour had been barely courteous even to a private person. "The emperor," said Benedict, "whenever he saw that I recognised him, forbade me to tell you at the time."

That same day Akber left for Burhanpur, whence he could direct the siege of Asir, which was about twelve miles off.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HISTORY OF AKBER BADSHA.

THE reader who has not studied the history of India may, it is hoped, now be curious to know something of the greatest of the Mogul emperors. Baber, fifth in descent from Timur Khan, had gone through many misfortunes and romantic exploits before he gained for himself the Kingdom of Kabul, to which he added by conquest the greater portion of Hindustan. Humayun, his son and successor, had been expelled from his dominions through the valour of Shir Shah, an Afghan chief, and the faithlessness of his own brothers. While an exile in Scinde, Humayun, in the apartments of his step-mother, met with a young lady called Hamida, the daughter of a preceptor of his brother, Prince Hindal, and in spite of the remonstrances of his brother he almost immediately married her. Chased from place to place, he wandered about with a few followers, and during his flight from Ajmere across the desert some of his party died for want of water, and Humayun had to face about with twenty men to fight his pursuers. So great were their

sufferings that all but the selfish instinct of preservation was lost. An officer who had lent his horse to Hamida, finding that his own would bear him no longer, compelled the begum to dismount, and Humayun was obliged to give her his own, and proceed on foot till he met with a luggage camel. With seven mounted followers they reached Amercot, a fort in the desert not far from the Indus, where he found a friend in the Hindu Rana. At this time, while his fortunes were so low, his wife gave birth to Akber (14th October, 1542). Soon after his father and mother had again to fly for their lives, when the infant fell into the hands of his uncle Askeri. Restored to his parents, Akber shared in their dangers and privations. At the Court of the Shah of Persia they learned the miseries of poverty and dependence. Towards the close of his life Humayun recovered a part of his dominions. At the age of thirteen Akber became heir to the territory round Agra and Delhi. When seventeen years of age he was himself at the head of affairs. He employed his long reign in recovering the different provinces to which he had a hereditary claim, in subduing the insubordination of his military chiefs, and in regulating the internal policy and revenue of his great empire. At the time of our story Akber was ruler of the whole territory now known as the Bengal Presidency, as well as of Kabul, Cashmere, Gujerat, and Gwalior. He had now turned his attention to subdue the princes of the south of India.

It might have been said of the great men of Europe,

like Henry IV. and Alexander of Parma, that, given their mental energy, they were the undeniable products of the age—just what might have been expected. This could not be said of the character of Akber. In spite of the Mogul traditions of his family, he was humane and beneficent. Though a warrior and a conqueror, he was a just ruler and a mild and wise legislator. Though brought up in tents, he was polished and urbane. Excelling in athletic sports, he was yet fond of literary pursuits. Reared in a fanatical religion, he was the most tolerant of rulers. Continually successful, he was ever moderate, and preserved an even temper under contradiction. His mental energy was astonishing. He took little sleep—according to one of the Jesuits, only three hours out of the twenty-four. He only ate once a-day. He abstained from animal food for months at a time, living on milk, rice, and sweetmeats. He was most attentive to business, and listened to reports which were made to him from different parts of the empire. He was accessible to all his subjects, and heard causes every day. He was particularly gracious in receiving the presents of poor people, sometimes putting their gifts in his bosom. He delighted in music and painting, and was fond of the society of men of letters. He got translations made from the sacred books, philosophy, and poetry of India. In everything he undertook he entered heart and soul. At one time, the Jesuits tell us, he might be seen despatching affairs of great importance, and giving audience to his subjects, and a little after he might be

shearing a camel, carving a stone, working at wood, or hammering at the forge with as much attention as if each business were his sole trade. He took great interest in Europeans, and several Portuguese envoys were received at his Court. The Jesuit missionary, Rodolf Aquaviva, son of the Duke of Atria, and a nephew of the general of the Jesuits, went to his Court with several Portuguese priests in 1580, and resided there three years. A copy of the Holy Scriptures in four languages was sent to the emperor. He listened to the discourses of the missionaries with decorous attention, and allowed his second son Murad to be instructed by the Father Aquaviva. In the presence of the missionaries, Akber kissed a picture of the Saviour with great veneration, and made his sons do the same. Nevertheless, Aquaviva had tired of waiting, and returned to the missions on the coast, where he fell a victim to his zeal, being killed by the people of Salsette. A second, and now a third mission, had succeeded them at the Court. Thus the Fathers of St. Paul, as they were called, had not given up the hopes of gaining over this great prince to the faith, when, by inaugurating a system of patronage and persecution, they hoped to convert the whole Indian peninsula, as they had done in the islands and coast over which they had power. For a time, at least, they believed that it was only state considerations and the influence of the women which prevented Akber professing Christianity. The truth is, Akber had been taught by the two learned brothers Faizi and Abul

Fazl to regard Mahomet as simply an Arab of extraordinary eloquence, but in all probability he never regarded particular forms of religion as of moment. He once entered into the oratory of the Fathers, took off his turban, and prayed in their manner; he then prayed in the Mahomedan and Hindu manner, and rising from the earth, he said that God ought to be adored in all manners. For some years Akber indulged the hope of uniting all his subjects in one religion, a system of deism with moral precepts agreeable to his generous nature, and a belief in the transmigration of souls. The ritual consisted of prayer and meditation at sunrise, noon, sunset, and midnight. It was probably to satisfy the symbolism of the Hindus that so much veneration was shown to the sun as well as to light. There were a few rules or recommendations, such as to abstain from flesh meats, and not to eat with butchers, professional hunters, and bird-catchers. The emperor took the trouble to give personal initiation into this new sect, and so far yielded to the flattery of his courtiers as to breathe on cups of water which were given to cure the sick, much in the same way that the kings of England and France used to touch people to cure them of scrofula, but he met with little success in spreading his tenets beyond the coterie of freethinkers that had gathered around him. They were regarded with as much horror by the strict Mahomedans as any of similar views are in Christian countries. Perfect religious toleration existed in his empire at a time when the Moriscoes were expelled from Spain, and the

Catholics and Protestants were shedding one another's blood. During his reign the Hindus were admitted to the highest offices of state. No prince ever knew better how to govern India, to make himself respected, obliged, loved, and feared.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAND SULTANA AND THE SIEGE OF AHMADNAGAR.

ABOUT two years and a-half before, the Moguls had been invited into this country by a factious chief, who promised to let them into the fort of Ahmadnagar. There was no one to resist them save a woman, Chand Bibi, widow of the King of Bijapur, and guardian of the young King of Ahmadnagar. Khan Khanan, a famous general, with Prince Murad, the youngest son of Akber, soon came with three thousand horse, but found the gates shut.

The Moguls now invested the fort, and cut off a body of troops sent to relieve it. After three months' siege they carried five mines under the walls, when Chand Bibi, learning what was doing through her spies, set her people to countermining. They had thus spoiled two mines, when Prince Murad put on his armour to storm the fort, without communicating with the old commander-in-chief, with whom he was not on good terms. Three of the mines were sprung, and eighty feet of the wall was carried away. Such was the alarm, that the works were deserted, so that the Moguls could have got

in without resistance, had they not lost time in waiting for the springing of the other two mines. In the meantime, Chand Bibi appeared wearing armour, with a veil on her face and a naked sword in her hand. She rallied the fugitives, caused rockets to be thrown into the ditch, and guns brought to bear on the breach. When the Moguls at last came in sight, the breach was defended with such obstinacy that the ditch was nearly filled with dead bodies. One storming party succeeded another, from four in the afternoon till darkness. On the return of light next morning, they found that a parapet of stones, earth, and dead bodies, eight feet high, now filled up the space in the broken wall. Chand Bibi had stood by the breach all night, encouraging the workmen. Finding that relieving forces were gathering round, the Moguls made a treaty with the queen, and marched away. But so little trust had the queen for her allies, that when an army gathered for her relief appeared three days after the raising of the siege, she caused the gates to be shut on them. After this Chand Bibi was always called Chand Sultana. Though supported by her nephew, the King of Bijapur, she was not able to get the stipulations of the treaty faithfully carried out, nor to command the obedience of the military chiefs. Some of them again invited the Moguls to return, and Ahmadnagar was now besieged by a great force under Abul Fazl and Prince Danyal, while Akber conducted the siege of Asir. Khan Khanan had lost the favour of the emperor because he could not agree with Murad,

and the prince himself had died from the effects of his drunken excesses.

Ashbourne soon began to see that the Moguls were no novices in the art of attacking strong places. Approaching as near as they could to the walls, they dug trenches, and used the earth to stuff gabions covered with leather, which they built into parapets to defend their batteries. They continued their zig-zag approaches till they got near the ramparts, when they commenced to sink their shafts and dig galleries underground in order to undermine the bastions. Before leaving the camp to return to Burhanpur, Akber had written a letter to the besieged queen, which was put into the hands of one of their spies. The letter was conveyed into the city, and laid in the way of Chand Sultana. Akber praised her courage and wisdom, and reminded her how ungratefully she had been treated by her subjects, and the intrigues and mutinies which had existed for years. If she would put herself and the young king under the protection of the emperor, he would see that she was obeyed by her mutinous subjects, and treat her with all the honour which she so highly deserved. The queen read the flattering letter through, and then tore it in two and thrust it from her.

During the progress of the works, Ashbourne was repeatedly consulted as to where the batteries should be placed. He was employed to direct one which would keep under the fire of the enemy upon the advancing siege works. The enemy had some very

large cannon, which took a long time in loading and often missed their aim, as well as smaller pieces whose fire was more to be dreaded. In the meantime, the activity of the besiegers, their powerful artillery fire, and the great strength of their army, caused much consternation in the city.

Chand Sultana called a council to consider what was to be done. The queen sat on a throne with two women by her side. Around the spacious apartment sat the principal officers, amongst whom were her brother, Murtaza Nizam Shah, the eunuch Humeed Khan, an Abyssinian, and several Arabs, as well as the native chiefs of the country.

"You all remember," said she, "how glad we were when Murad Mirza was driven away, but now they are back so much stronger than ever, that for one that then retreated now ten have returned. I thought that, from the attack upon their trenches, something would be gained. If you had fought as bravely as you talked, you would have smote the enemy."

"Noble princess!" replied Humeed Khan, who had led the unsuccessful sally, "we were driving the enemy before us like dust before the wind, when we came to the battery of the Angrezis; your brave soldiers put the matchlock-men to flight, but the white artillery-men, leaving their guns, rushed upon our men with their short swords, and drove them back, and then the whole force of the Moguls poured upon us and——" here he stopped, but the indignant queen continued the narrative, "and your livers became like water, and

you ran away ! I saw that part of the business from the walls. They say there are not more than three score of the Feringhis. Was that enough to turn you back had they all fought like Sekander (Alexander) ? ”

“ Their leader wounded Jalal,” went on Humeed Khan, “ and all men know that he is the best swordsman in the city. He went away spitting blood, and this checked our soldiers.”

“ What like were the Angrezis ? ” asked the queen ; “ but perhaps you were not near enough to see ? ”

“ Great princess,” said Humeed, anxious no doubt to satisfy her curiosity and dispose of her sarcasm, “ the white men are horribly ugly, of an unpleasing white complexion, with rough faces, snub noses, and straw-coloured hair, but real tigers in battle. Their leader is a good-looking young man ; I heard his voice clear and loud encouraging the Moguls to fall on.”

“ Does any of you know,” said the queen, “ what the Moguls are doing in the trenches ? ”

“ I have a message,” said a chief, “ from a man who does service with the Fathers of St. Paul. He says that they are digging three mines.”

“ Could you not get him to send a plan ? ” asked Humeed Khan.

“ No ; the miners are stupid men, and work like musk-rats, they are able to tell nothing, and the engineers are carefully watched, and are afraid to take a bribe. Akber, before he left the camp, asked the great Padre to write to the Governor of Choul to get

the Portuguese guns in the fort to help in battering our walls, but the Father said that the Viceroy of Goa would never consent to do this, and the emperor was very angry, and told the Fathers to leave the camp, which they would be glad to do, only they are afraid the Mogul's horsemen would fall upon them and plunder them on the road."

"I think both the Fathers and the Portuguese wish the siege to fail. These priests care neither for badsha nor rajah," said Hassan, a Portuguese deserter, "but are only anxious to gain men through guile or force to their vile religion. Every country, where they come, is eaten up by faction and war."

"But were you not once yourself a Christian?" asked Chand Sultana.

"No, never, queen," answered the Portuguese; "I was indeed born in Algarve, but my parents were of the old race of the Moors, and I was brought up a true believer, though we had to say our prayers in secret for fear of the Nazarene priests. Can nothing be done to get rid of these Feringhi artillerymen? Their fire is so close and thick that our gunners fly from the bastions, and they are pushing guns forward to break the wall."

Then followed a long wrangling discussion, in which some proposed making terms with the Moguls, others resistance to the last. In the end, it was agreed that the city people should be assembled with spade and mattock to construct a mound, on the top of which a new battery should be erected, and Chand Sultana

herself engaged to come amongst them to encourage the gunners. At the same time, a sally was to be made from the gates to take the trenches in flank. It was also arranged that counter-mines should be dug to meet the mines of the besiegers.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CITY STORMED—THE CAPTIVES.

IN a few days the mound was raised behind the city wall in a position to bear on Ashbourne's battery. A platform was constructed, and the top of the curtain wall being thrown over by blasting, supplemented by hundreds of ready hands, at sunrise a hot fire was opened upon the Englishmen's position and the neighbouring trenches. Considerable execution was done upon the Mogul guards. Four of Ashbourne's crew were killed, and two wounded.

It was found necessary to strengthen and add to the height of his parapet before he could reply in good earnest. Chand Sultana kept her word. Bearing a sword in her hand, and attended by two Abyssinian women, she came into the new battery, and stationed a guard behind to prevent the gunners leaving. Dressed in a loose spencer of brocaded cloth, with drawers of red silk, and a thin veil over her head and face which scarcely obscured the haughty lines of her dark features and the wild flash of her eye, her spare figure trembling with excitement, her voice shrill and loud, she ran from

gun to gun encouraging the men, using praise, promises, sarcasm, threats. On the other side the Moguls redoubled their fire, and pushed forward their matchlock men. The struggle between the batteries went on with loss on both sides, but in the evening the supply of bullets in the queen's battery became exhausted, and she sent an urgent message for more to the officer in charge of the magazine, who replied that he had no more lead, but if she would send some money he might tempt the people to bring what they had concealed. Chand Sultana received the message with indignation mingled with suspicion. Her mind being now worked up to the highest stage of excitement she ordered the copper, silver, and gold in her treasury to be converted into cannon balls, and after a sleepless night her gunners opened fire. That Ashbourne should recognise the nature of this novel kind of projectile was no doubt owing to his old skill in working with the precious metals. A ball striking on a large stone, he noticed something peculiar about the manner of flattening, and taking it up in his hand he examined it more carefully. It was heavy like lead, but of a yellow colour. His next idea was that it must be copper. Looking more carefully he perceived that the ball was of gold. A bullet grazing his shoulder now reminded him that it would be vain to gather riches if he lost his life. If they are firing away golden bullets, he thought, their discharge will not last long. On the fire slackening he got some natives to gather the bullets which had fallen around, when he found that some of them were gold and

some silver. Separating them from other balls of baser materials he got them put into some leather bags on the back of a camel, and borne to his tent, determined that though his men should share in the prize yet he should in the meantime keep his knowledge to himself.

Manouchi, a Venetian who lived in India in the days of Aurangzeb, tells us that even in his time, above sixty years later, these golden and silver bullets were found about Ahmadnagar, and that he himself had seen one of gold which weighed eight pounds.

In the meantime, through exhaustion and disappointment, Chand Sultana had subsided from the exaltation of her feelings. The idea dawned upon her that the power of the Moguls was too great to be resisted, that her people were losing heart, that some were seeking an opportunity of deserting a losing cause, and others were willing to betray her. Calling another council of war she again sought their advice. Some of the bravest chiefs had been killed in the cannonade. They met anxious and fearful, with the Mogul cannon sounding in their ears. Some advised trying to make terms; others blamed the arrangement of the defence and the want of co-operation, and the reckless firing away of precious metals from the cannon's mouth. Humeed Khan gave as his opinion that the place should be defended to the last. The queen reproached them for their insubordinate spirit, and bearing in mind what she had experienced of their conduct for the last few years, she had lost all reliance on them. She saw that the defence would soon break

down, and therefore thought it advisable that they should negotiate for the evacuation of the fort, on condition that the garrison should be allowed to leave with their private property. Then they might retire to Junir with the young king. As the most of the council approved of this proposal, Humeed Khan ran out into the street crying that Chand Sultana was corresponding with the Moguls for the delivering of the fort. Gathering together a mob of the shortsighted and ungrateful Deckanies he led them into her private apartments, where with sword and spear they made an end of the heroic queen. When the besiegers heard of the murder of Chand Sultana they were mightily encouraged. Three mines had been dug under the wall. They were then built up with stones and mortar, and thirty barrels of gunpowder being deposited, the galleries were filled up, leaving room for a train. The storming parties waited in the upper gallery for the explosion, which was arranged to take place at sunrise. Ashbourne was waiting in his battery in case they should be driven back, but when he heard the shouts of the exulting Moguls, and when column after column pressed towards the fort, he knew that the way was clear into the place. He moved in with his men and occupied a bastion near the breach, and turned the guns upon the enemy. Combined resistance seemed over, but as the Moguls gave no quarter, and as the men of Ahmadnagar were dexterous swordsmen, many of the assailants met with their death.

Seeing that the assailants were still gaining ground,

Ashbourne, actuated by mixed feelings of curiosity, adventure, and hopes of plunder, advanced with a party of his men. He stopped at a large house, where shouts and blows indicated that a struggle was going on. The defenders had retreated to the flat roof, which was accessible by a narrow stair, up which the soldiers were trying to force their way. Several dead were lying on the stairs, whose turbans, cut and soaked with blood, bore token of the obstinate defence on the top of the house. One man passed him with a deep cut on the face. Just as Ashbourne appeared, the top of the stairs was gained, and the Mogul soldiers rushed up, killing the defenders, or hurling them over the low wall which bounded the flat roof. Their leader, a powerful-looking Afghan, rushed upon a tall Rajput, who received a sword-cut upon his shield, seized the Afghan by the waist, and dragged him to the edge of the parapet, over which they both toppled. A young Hindu woman ran forward, apparently with the intention of throwing herself after them, but one of the Moguls caught her by the arm. She was richly dressed, and wore a profusion of jewellery, which at once attracted the cupidity of the soldiers. In a few seconds her ornaments were torn off by two or three eager competitors. When Ashbourne appeared they had thrown her down, and were pulling off her silver anklets. Ashbourne was struck with pity at the terrified and beseeching look of the woman, and stepping forward, he pushed the Moguls aside. Having well-nigh divested her of all her ornaments, they did not consider the remainder worth contesting, and

turned away with a mixture of scorn and anger to seek for further spoil. Ashbourne lifted up the slender figure. Her long black hair was torn and scattered; her face was besmeared with blood, for the soldiers had torn away her ear-rings and the ornament which hung from her nose; but the oval face, the bright black eye, and the elegant drooping form of the Rajputin, aroused feelings of pity and tenderness. Speaking to her in a reassuring tone, he put her gently on her feet, and helped her to descend the stair. A little girl, who had been gazing for a few moments, now ran forward and seized the woman by the clothes, which she held firmly while descending the narrow stair. When they reached the outside, the woman rushed with passionate grief to the body of the Rajput, who had been stabbed again and again by the enraged Moguls. The Afghan chief, who was grievously hurt, was borne away by some of his men. Ashbourne hurried the Rajputin away to the bastion, whence he sent her to the camp.

On the way they met Benedict de Goes, with some servants attached to the mission, escorting nine prisoners in Mussulman garb.

When Stephen returned to his tents, he went to see the Hindu captive whom he had rescued. Ashbourne entered the tent, and said a few words to her. She turned round slowly to look at him. Though she had washed her face and arranged her hair, her swollen face and torn dress still bore witness to the brutal treatment which she had suffered. She showed the most undisguised terror at his appearance, and as the few Hindi

words he could command seemed in no way to reassure her, Stephen could think of nothing better than to turn round and leave the tent. It was long since he had spoken to a woman, and he had vowed never to speak to one again, unless previously addressed, and here was he retreating in confusion before a captive, and inquiring anxiously in his own mind whether the unflattering reception which he had encountered was not owing to his rough and disordered dress.

In about an hour his interpreter announced that a Hindu chief wanted to see him. On his desiring him to come in, there entered one of those fine, dark, martial figures whom Ashbourne had repeatedly admired whilst strolling through the camp. After a very low obeisance, the chief explained his object. He had been told that the noble warrior had that morning rescued a lady who was his sister. She had been married several years before to a Rajput chief in Candesh, and her husband was now with a force which had been gathering to relieve Ahmadnagar. He implored Ashbourne to permit her to return to him, and promised a goodly ransom. Ashbourne was somewhat disconcerted at this intelligence, which, however, it did not occur to him to disbelieve, as his interpreter assured him that the chief was well known, and that he had come with a body of his caste to serve under Akber. Yielding to his best impulses, the Englishman led the Rajput chief into the tent where the lady was. At a word the lady recognised him, and turning to Ashbourne, she knelt and clasped her hands in the attitude of prayer.

Ashbourne told her to rise and go away with her brother, since she had found him. The joy and gratitude of the brother and sister were overpowering. Ashbourne refused money, but accepted a dagger richly jewelled. Calling some of his attendants, the young chief soon obtained some male garments, and bound a pugarie round the head of the young Rajputin, who, in the disguise of a boy, was soon ready to leave.

They took no notice of the little girl, who watched their preparations without showing any desire to follow them. Stephen, through his interpreter, asked who she was. The Rajputin lady said that she was a Mussulmani girl who lived near them. She had probably fled into her uncle's house during the tumult. When she was led away to the camp the child had seized her by the hand, and clung to her for protection. Not wishing to see the little girl murdered, she had suffered her to come along with her. Otherwise, she, the Rajputin, knew nothing of the child, who was not of their caste. The warm feelings which had glowed during the hour of danger had passed away. It was clear that they did not wish to take the child with them, so Ashbourne, calling for a Mahomedan woman, the wife of one of his attendants, told her to give the child some food, and to get what she needed.

The spoil gained by the taking of Ahmadnagar was enormous, and the young king was led away to the castle of Gwalior, where Akber kept his dethroned captives. What especially pleased Abul Fazl, a very fine library, was among the spoils. To Ashbourne he

gave much praise, as well as a handsome present, and a liberal donation to his men.

Benedict de Goes appeared one evening. He said that the prisoners whom he had been seeing out of the fort were renegade and fugitive Portuguese. Through the interest of Father Jerome Xavier their lives had been spared, but they had all to make a new profession of Christianity. When told the story of the Rajputin whom Ashbourne had rescued, Benedict, while gravely recording his opinion that it was better she should be away, avowed his suspicions that the relationship of the Rajput chief was not of such a close brotherly character. Benedict asked to see the little maiden still left with Ashbourne, and she was sent for. The child entered with the gravity of an old woman, holding a muslin veil over her head. She was watchful, demure, and attentive, her black eyes moving quickly to catch every gesture of the two strangers; and, though she apparently was not troubled with shyness, gave short and cautious replies to the questions of the Portuguese, who seemed amused at her archness and sagacity.

Benedict, who, as an old soldier, sometimes relaxed a little with Stephen Ashbourne, now confessed that he had some jewels and money which, not regarding those sublunary objects too highly, he was willing to risk at cards. With an occasional sip of a flagon of wine, they spent the rest of the evening at play, in which the brother of the mission was so successful, that Ashbourne had a difficulty in paying the whole of his losses

in gold, this being the tender which the Portuguese desired.

“Never mind,” said Benedict, “if you choose to give to the care of the mission the little girl whom you showed me, it will put me out of debt. What can you do with this child? She will only be a trouble, but the Fathers will be able to take care of her, and to see that she is well educated.”

Stephen laughed unrestrainedly at this proposal. “What would you do with the girl? She is too young to be your mistress, and, as she got older, she would be sure to work mischief amongst the holy Fathers!”

The Portuguese would not take the thing in a jesting-manner.

“It were better,” he observed, “that the child should be brought up a Christian than go again amongst the heathen, or be borne about with a company of artillery till she was lost or died for want of care.”

“Be of good cheer, Benedict,” replied the Englishman, “I shall pay you without throwing the child into the bargain. She has fallen into my hands by pure chance; none the less I shall take care of her.”

In the end Ashbourne gave him one of the gold bullets which he had picked up in the batteries. Though apparently surprised, the Portuguese took it away without any further question, when he understood that it was really gold. Next evening they resumed their play. Fortune returned to the Englishman, who won back a good deal of what he had so lately lost. Luckily this closed their gambling, for

the next time they met, Benedict said that he was afraid Father Xavier would hear of it if he played any more.

Leaving Prince Danyal to complete the conquest of the country around Ahmadnagar, Abul Fazl now marched with part of the army to Asir, in which Akber was besieging Bahadur Shah, the King of Candesh. Though the English crew complained much of the heat and the toilsome nature of the service, they had no choice but to accompany the force. Along with them went the Fathers of St. Paul and their retinue. After fifteen marches they reached Asir, a fort situated on a hill with precipices about a hundred feet all around, so that it was only accessible at one point. To this stronghold the people of the district had carried their more valuable effects and cattle. There were provisions to last for years, but the many thousand men and cattle crowded together into an area of about sixty acres, engendered a pestilence which weakened and terrified the defenders. The king did not even pay his soldiers regularly, and they became mutinous. Besides this a report gained credit that Akber had the power of taking forts by the aid of necromancy, and that he had magicians who accompanied his army for that purpose. This was confirmed by the arrival of Ashbourne and his companions, whose novel and outlandish appearance excited the wonder of the impressionable natives of the country.

Ashbourne's advice was sought about placing the artillery to bear upon the lower fort. With the working power at their disposal, this was soon ready.

One night, whilst it was raining hard, the tramp of a body of men was heard coming from the camp. Presently Abul Fazl appeared with Lasker Khan and a chosen band of men in the advanced battery occupied by Ashbourne and his company.

“No doubt,” said the Mogul general to Ashbourne, “you would soon have opened a way for us with your cannon, but we have here a man who has come to us from the fort who will show us a way in.”

About twenty men, led by Lasker Khan, then crept forward with the deserter, bearing with them powder bags to blow up the gate of the Malai fort. In a short time the darkness of the night was disturbed with a burst of flame and a loud explosion, followed by the sound of bugles. Abul Fazl pushed forward, and helped the advanced party to hold the gate till a further force came on. Bahadur Shah, losing heart, offered to surrender if the garrison were allowed to march out with their private property. This, however, was not allowed to include the long-hoarded treasures of the Kings of Candesh.

Ashbourne was present at the grand durbar in which the last of this dynasty was presented to the conqueror. It was held in the great tent called the *goshlkhana*. Akber was seated on a throne under a spacious canopy of flowered silk. A single diamond of great size and brilliancy sparkled on his turban, and a semicircle of pearls descended over his forehead. He wore a silken tunic, embroidered with gold, which descended to the knee, loose drawers, and slippers of European fashion.

The wretched prince slowly approached, after bending down and striking the ground and the top of his head with his hand. After some one had felt him to see if he had any concealed arms, he went to touch the Mogul's feet. Akber remained silent, and put his hand upon his neck. The new vassal then took his place amongst the grandees that stood around, a pensioner of the conqueror, to be kept under watch and guard. Then his presents were borne in, the wealth he had drained from the people around, and which he had grudged to use for his own defence and theirs.

Some there were who thought that the Feringhi artilleryman had too much honour in being allowed a place in that proud and splendid assembly; but no one dreamed that he was the first-comer of a people destined to dethrone hundreds of kings throughout India, who would one day lead captive the descendant of the mighty conqueror who sat in the throne of state. About 200 years afterwards, these very fortresses of Ahmadnagar and Asir were taken by Wellesley, who, very likely, had never heard of the English adventurer that had gone before him.

On the surrender of Asir, the Fathers took possession of seven half-caste Portuguese and their families, whom they got leave to send to Goa. Altogether they baptised about sixty persons. The little girl, Hasmat, had gone with the English company. Ashbourne had got a pony for her, on which she rode on the march. She was playful and intelligent, and Stephen delighted in her tricks and gambols.

She picked up English words rapidly, which she used in a comical way. She said that at Ahmadnagar she lived with her grandfather and grandmother, and that her mother had died some time before. She seemed about six or seven years old. After the taking of Asir, the Mussulmani who looked after her said that a woman had spoken to the child several times, and tried to tempt her away by offering her little gifts, and saying that she knew where her father was, and would take her to him. The woman said that she ought not to live with the white strangers. Finding that the child's story was true, Ashbourne warned her not to wander from the encampment, but one day she was missing, and could not be found. The Mussulmani said she believed that the woman who had tempted the child went about the Portuguese mission, and Ashbourne sent some messengers, but the people there denied all knowledge of the child. Next morning a man came, who told, in hopes of a reward, that a party sent away by the Fathers to Goa had the child with them. Ashbourne immediately got his horse saddled, and rode after them. After going a few miles he overtook the party. They had Hasmat in a bullock waggon. Her face was covered with a bhoorka, and they forbade her to cry out ; but whenever she heard Ashbourne's voice she shouted out. He ordered the driver to stop, and as he did not do so, he struck him several times with the flat of his sword. The bullocks being left alone stopped of themselves, when he took the little creature out of the cart, and put her before him on the saddle. There were about a

dozen of men in the party, who would likely have fallen upon Ashbourne, but two of his men who had ridden on behind now appeared. Though there was a great deal of talking and bravado and dancing about, it did not seem that the Portuguese were sufficiently zealous to fight about the matter, and the three Englishmen, who talked very little, bore the child away.

Hasmat clung nervously to Ashbourne, who was heartily glad to be able to rescue her. The whole English company seemed overjoyed when she was brought back. She said that a woman, who had spoken to her before, had taken her aside, promising her a gift, and that two more women had then laid hands on her, and hurried her away to the place where they were quartered. They tried to soothe and coax her. It was thought that they must have given her opium, for she slept all night, and when she awoke found herself in the bullock waggon ready for their journey.

Two days after the Fathers Pigneiro and Corsi appeared at Ashbourne's tent, and with the most engaging calmness and simplicity introduced the subject of the carrying away of the child, which they much condemned. They said that they took a great interest in the child, and heartily desired her welfare. If Ashbourne would intrust her to them they would see that she was well cared for and educated.

"It seems to me," said Ashbourne, shortly, "that you take a great interest in a concern which is none of yours. The child fell into my hands by the chance of war, and I have done my utmost to care for her. You have

coveted her, I know not well for what reason. That she was not kidnapped the other day is not the fault of your negligence, for that it was beyond your knowledge I cannot believe."

Father Corsi said in reply that with the attempt to carry away the child he had nothing to do, but that some of their people thought that they had a right to take the child in order to give her to her father, who was a subject of their king, being now at Lisbon. They therefore thought that they had a claim to the custody of the child, and intended to apply to the emperor should Ashbourne refuse to allow her to leave.

"And how are you assured of what you say?" asked Ashbourne.

"We know that she is the daughter of Furhad Khan, who commanded the army of Ahmadnager which besieged Choul six years ago. The siege was raised, and Furhad Khan taken prisoner, with his wife and daughter. His wife was ransomed, but the general and his daughter gave ear to the truth, and embraced our holy religion. This child was born after the mother returned to Ahmadnagar. As she was now dead surely the child should now be sent to her father and sister who are at Lisbon."

Ashbourne, though far from giving credit to this story, was startled at the plausible air which they gave to their claim for the custody of the child. As for giving her up to the Jesuits, he had no more idea of doing so than if Hasmat had been his own daughter.

CHAPTER IX.

THE EAST AND THE WEST—A PERIOD OF GREAT MEN.

THE appearance of the rains, which cut short the scorching heat of summer, was a welcome relief to the English company. Though weary of campaigning in so exhausting a climate, they were somewhat reconciled to it by the liberal pay allowed them, the unaccustomed luxury of obsequious attendance, and the distinction with which they were treated. In fact, they were expected to do nothing but fight. Stephen himself was unwearied in fulfilling the task which he had undertaken. He exerted himself for the comfort and welfare of his men, watched over their improvidence, and praised their courage and patience. Nothing more aptly calls out the resources of a fine character than to have the charge and care of others under trying circumstances. To Stephen it was especially salutary, as it served to turn aside his tendency to brood over his own grievances and misfortunes. In the midst of serious toils and dangers he felt happier than he had ever done before, for he now found play to all his capacities. He had no desire to return to England, where, to use his

own expression, he would be like a hop without a pole. In England he well understood that he could not rise as he was doing in India. In his own country gentility was inherited riches, and having gained riches, it took a family three or four generations to rise to the level of the gentry. None below this rank could gain military command. The poorer classes were destined by providence for a low condition, and it was the duty of their betters to keep them in it. In India, save the emperor, every one was equal. His favour raised the lowest to the highest offices. He was the owner of all the land in his dominions, and the estates he granted on the death of the life-occupant reverted to the sovereign. As we have seen, Ashbourne left Europe profoundly discontented with the inequalities of position ; but, though endowed with a strong sense of justice, he was naturally ambitious, and those who have risen, whatever their abstract views, are easily reconciled to the inequalities of condition in those they have left below them. He was now in presence of a society arranged under a different scheme. Through the force of events his place in it was better than what he held in Europe. He got rid of some old grievances. To change the civilisation of the West for that of the East, you at least get a change of some sources of annoyance. There are new evils ready of course, but they need not begin to gall you at once, just as a man going to India gets free from coughs and colds, without necessarily taking ague or disease of the liver. From natural temperament as well as past

experience, Ashbourne was prepared to look upon Eastern life in a tolerant and even in a friendly spirit. He was willing to be pleased, and soon was deeply interested by the strange procession of events. Out of a hundred English who go to India, about one is able to understand the native character. Stephen Ashbourne was of this kind. He learnt the Hindustani rapidly, and continued to show such a capacity for organising corps of artillery, that Akber hastened to recognise his merit, by conferring upon him increased rank and pay. Relaxing the etiquette of an eastern ruler, the emperor took pleasure in conversing with the young Englishman. Beginning to talk about artillery and assaulting fortified places, he went on asking many questions about the trade and condition of Europe, and the great men of the West, that is about men who ruled states and led armies, for these are the great men of the present, the only men who are allowed to realise their own greatness, and so Stephen never mentioned Shakspeare, though he had seen him act at the Globe Theatre, nor Ben Johnson, whom he had met with the army in Flanders, nor had he read any of his poetry, which indeed was only of very recent date. In like manner, when our adventurer was introduced to Ferishta, who came in the suite of the Princess Jani Begum, daughter of the King of Bijapur, to be married to the Prince Danyal, he did not know that the unassuming munshi, who probably sought his company to ask questions about Europe, was a learned historian. Indeed, the rajahs, chiefs, and generals who thronged to that splen-

did ceremonial took very little notice of the man whose pen was to make them famous. What was it that made this period so fertile in great men both in Europe and in India? Along with Akber and his statesmen and generals, flourished the great writers who made his reign the golden literary age of India. Chief amongst these were Abul Fazl, his brother Faizi, and Ferishta.

The Prince Danyal was a pleasant, well-built young man, fond of horses and elephants, and was said to have some talent in composing Hindustani poems. Nothing, however, could overcome his fondness for wine, which obliged his father to keep him always under some form of surveillance or restraint. For the emperor, Ashbourne felt an admiration which went on increasing the more opportunities he had of learning his history, and observing his great abilities.

Ashbourne always hoped that the Moguls, pushing their conquest to the sea, might end by invading the Portuguese possessions, and he dreamed of directing his artillery against the walls of Goa, Choul, and Diu, and of returning in triumph to England with some of the spoils of the seats of the Portuguese power in India. At the least he thought that he might be allowed to occupy some port, whence an opening might be made for trade with England, and a naval war might be carried on with the Portuguese. This was fully in accordance with the designs of Akber, who used to say that the danger to India now lay on the coasts, since the Feringhis had discovered a way of reaching India by sea. But after spending about a year in pushing his conquests in the

south, the emperor was recalled to Agra, the capital of his dominions, by the news of the alarming behaviour of his eldest son, Selim. This prince, to whom had been left the management of affairs in Hindustan during the campaign in the Deckan, had found the sovereign power so agreeable, that he commenced to act entirely on his own authority, and assumed the title and state of an independent king, even coining money in his own name. Akber with a portion of his army marched straight for Agra, leaving the rest under Abul Fazl to carry on the war in the south. He desired Ashbourne to come with him in order to form a corps of artillery at Agra, or to use modern terms, to organise the ordnance department.

Stephen took with him ten of the old *Unicorn* men. The rest were left in quarters at Burhanpur under the command of Henry Ames of Deptford, who had acted as Ashbourne's lieutenant at the sieges of Jumud, Ahmadnagar, and Asir.

CHAPTER X.

AT AGRA—STEPHEN'S QUARTERS—A COURT PHYSICIAN
AND THE DIVINE FAITH.

AKBER had made Agra his capital. During his lifetime it was usually called Akberabad. In fact he had built a new and splendid city on the right bank of the Jumna, at a bend of the river opposite the old town. It was not yet surrounded with a wall, but a deep ditch or conduit was led round the southern side. About this time it might contain nearly half-a-million of people. The grandees and wealthy merchants had built stately mansions amongst groves and gardens, so that the city seemed half hid amongst the deep foliage. The palace was on an eminence near the river, surrounded by a wall twenty-five feet high, built of polished red stone. No joint could be seen in the masonry ; it looked as if it had been cut out of the solid rock. The palace, presenting the noblest front in the world, was turned towards the wide river, which, during time of flood, sometimes washed the walls, but in other seasons left bare the strand, on which the elephant fights and other games were held. Though

in those days some of the most beautiful buildings, which are still so much admired, had not been built, what was already there was new, bright, and gorgeous. It seemed like a dreamland compared to the sombre old towns of England or Flanders. Akber had attracted to his capital some Italian and French artists and lapidaries, who were employed in decorating the interior of his palaces and public buildings with mosaics of marble, porphyry, jasper, and precious stones, in a style which only enormous wealth could enable him to carry out. It might be called designing pictures in polished stone of the brightest colours. In fact, the emperor had founded a school of art, of which the tomb of Humayun, at Delhi, and the remains at Fatipur Sikri are the earliest examples, and which, under his grandson, Jehan, culminated in the Taj Mahal, the most beautiful monument in the world.

Amongst the European artists, Ashbourne found a countryman of his own, William Leedes, the jeweller, who had come to India in company with Ralph Fitch. The emperor had formed a collection of European paintings, and had native artists, who copied them most exactly. The Europeans naturally sought one another's company, and formed an agreeable and amusing society. The Jesuit missionaries had also returned to Agra with the emperor. They had a house by the Jumna, near the palace, with a chapel and other religious buildings adjoining. Jerome Xavier had written in Persian a book called "The Bridge of Life," in which he mixed up the gospel history with apocry-

phal legends in a way which he thought would catch the fancy of the Mogul emperor, for the Jesuits had already begun that system of unworthy conciliation to native prejudices, which a few years later Robert Nobili carried out to such a scandalous extent in Southern India, giving out that he was a Brahmin of Rome, and baptising low-caste Hindus through a straw.

Ashbourne found this friendly and brilliant society an agreeable relief from the grim destructiveness, misery, and cruelty of war. The strange sights, the novel colours, the splendid costumes, the mixture of fine houses and gardens, with their tropical trees and flowers, awoke in him the hereditary taste, half-sensuous, half-intellectual, so that he tried to help the emperor in his dream of fair architecture. He contributed some designs for mosaic work and jewellery which were much praised by his good-natured Italian friends, and won the approval of the emperor.

Akber promised that he would get an agreeable dwelling for Ashbourne and his companions, and he kept his word. About two miles to the south of Agra, and separated by a deep ravine, there were some stately old buildings, the abode of a former Mahomedan chief. There was a stone house very solidly built, with a broad, pillared verandah on every side. The accommodation consisted of about a dozen rooms. It had a flat roof, and a square balcony in the middle with four open windows, where one could sit in the cool of the evening. This was Ashbourne's house ; to the right of it was an old mosque, and beyond this a beautiful

irrigated garden. Somewhat to the left and behind was another house, used by those English who had come with him. In front of Ashbourne's house there was about thirty acres of ground, shaded by gigantic mango trees. The vertical sun sought every opening amongst the thick leaves and branches, but scarcely a single shaft of light got through to strike the ground. Under the mighty shade of these mango trees, Ashbourne could sit, or walk about, or practise the bow. The branches were full of birds; squirrels darted about from tree to tree; the hum of insect life was always present in the air. On the other side, behind the house, there was a row of roomy huts built round a large open square, and behind this again was a wide parade ground. He occupied his time in forming and training a corps of artillery. The emperor sent the most likely of his soldiers to learn to become gunners, and sometimes took Ashbourne to the arsenal to superintend the casting of new pieces of cannon.

Our hero had the rank of a chief of a thousand horse, with proportionate high pay. This put him at once upon the Court list. Ashbourne showed a dislike for attending the nightly levees at the hall of audience. The emperor excused him, on account of his foreign manners, from the fatiguing evening parade which was always kept up by the Mogul emperors. It might be said that though there was more natural servility, the exactions of the Emperor of India were less humiliating than those paid by her courtiers to the vain and imperious Queen of England. In fact, though Stephen

Ashbourne now showed himself an ambitious man, I do not think that he would have been willing to buy rank and promotion with the outrageous flattery paid to Elizabeth by Sir Walter Raleigh, said to be the proudest man in England. Pride being a very unreasonable quality, is often an unequal one, and sometimes leads men to commit mean actions. As for Ashbourne, every one smiled upon him when it was known that he was so favoured by the emperor. Some of the old seamen of the *Unicorn*, who came with him to Agra, showed good capacity, and were promoted to higher offices than they had ever dreamed of. As Nicholas Hart remarked, "The farther they got from the sea, the more honour was paid to them. They were first treated like honest men, then like gentlemen, then like lords, then like counts, then they were called highnesses, and if they only got far enough inland, they would peradventure be worshipped like gods." Ashbourne was now pretty fluent at the Hindi tongue, and got a munshi to teach him Persian, which was the language of the Court.

On one occasion the emperor took Ashbourne with him, about thirty miles from Agra, to hunt with leopards. In scrambling over some rocks, Stephen got an injury to the leg, and had to be carried back in a dooly. He was treated by Hakim Ali of Gilan. This learned doctor, as he repeatedly informed Stephen, had studied under Shah Fathullah of Shiraz. He evidently regarded, or at least wished to be regarded, all other practitioners who had not studied at Shiraz as of an inferior class.

"It is fortunate for yourself, noble Feringhi," quoth the Hakim, "that you did not call in Hassam Ali of Panipat, who persists in calling himself Hakim Ali in order to get practice under my name. He is so ignorant that he has never read the works of Averroes. Not many days since a man died in his hands who had an injury similar to yours. That story of his curing the emperor of a hurt which he had got from a buck at a deer-fight is never correctly told. But how shall men learn the truth when so few can see events as they really happen? The emperor would have been well a fortnight sooner had he been let alone."

"That may be," said Ashbourne, "only it is an imprudent sentence in the mouth of a physician."

Hakim Ali was called the Galen of his time, and had a great reputation at Court. He spent 6000 rupees a-year in giving medicine to poor people, who accused him of being too fond of making experiments upon them. He had for a time been intimate with Rodolf Aquaviva, the Jesuit missionary, who had hoped to make him a convert, and instructed him in the Latin language; but when the Hakim had learned it sufficiently to read European works on anatomy and medicine, he had abruptly dropped the Father's acquaintance. This was no doubt one of the reasons why there was such a dislike between Hakim Ali and the missionaries then at Court, Jerome Xavier and Emanuel Pigneiro.

After his recovery, the Hakim asked Ashbourne to come to see him at his house. The doctor received our

hero with great courtesy, expressed in florid terms his delight at having so valued a guest, and then, leading him to a square tank in his garden, asked Stephen if he could dive under the water, he himself offering to go first, in case he should lose the way. Stephen, who already knew something of the eccentricities of his host, divested himself of his raiment, and took a header after the Hakim, whom he followed under the water till they emerged into a beautiful apartment, where they found clothes for each of them, and a breakfast ready, to which they directed their attention. Hakim Ali now addressed his young friend with great freedom.

“You are rapidly rising in the esteem of the emperor, and will, if nothing go wrong, in the end attain to much power and wealth; but for this very reason you have many enemies, and the favour of princes is insecure. What would immoveably fix you in the esteem of this great prince, the possessor of the sciences, would be to become initiated in the Divine faith.”

Ashbourne required to be told what this Divine faith was, when he explained it as a system of deism, mixed with adoration of the sun, as the visible emblem of Divine power, which the emperor wished to substitute for the warring religions of India. Though Ashbourne had learned at this freethinking Court to be indifferent about the religions of other people, he had no intention of changing his own, in which, if he did not live at the time, he at least wished to die.

It seemed like asking him to pay apostacy as the

price of worldly advancement; in fact, most of the courtiers who were initiated into the Divine faith gained something by it. Ashbourne did not receive Hakim Ali's exhortations with much respect.

"Why," said the latter, "the Fathers of St. Paul said that you were a man of no religion."

"If they said I was a man of no religious belief, they did me foul wrong," replied Ashbourne. "But I was told that you were a Shia Mussulman."

"So I was, when I came to Hindustan," replied the Hakim. "Since then, I have knocked at the door of the seventy-two sects, but I found all emptiness within. I have tried the Hindu, the Christian, the Jain, and the Farsi. They have all some of the truth, as men can live on rice, or wheat, or millet, or milk, or flesh, or fish: for the principle of nourishment is hid under a hundred forms. There is no absolute religion, but why should we not take Akber as our guide? He has extracted the good of many religions, and his faith has no silly miracles, such as that the moon was split by an Arab. Why should a wise man reject the Divine faith because it will help him to fortune? By adopting it I myself have attained a complete serenity of mind, and have risen above all small jealousies."

In truth, Hakim Ali no more believed in Akber's religion than in any other. He would repeat with much approval the verses of Omar Khayam. "I came not here of my own design, and one day I must go, and no choice of mine. If coming had been in my power, I would not have come. If going were in my

power, I would not go. Ah, best of all lots, if in this world of clay I had come not, nor gone, nor been at all."

Ashbourne judged that the Hakim must have told the emperor of their conversation, for not long after Akber himself introduced the subject. He dilated on the misery which warring creeds had caused in India. "The Millenium of Islam is now past.* A new prophet will arise. Why should I not be the Mahadi? I would have one faith, one rule, one people; only thus will India be great. The object of my life is to mould all our tribes and castes into one nation; no longer will the Mussulman massacre the Hindu, and the Hindu draw the sword on the Mussulman, nor the high castes treat the low castes like unclean beasts; no longer will the Portuguese plunder our shipping, and build their forts on our coasts. With India united as one people, she will be too strong for the fierce tribes of the north-west, who have plundered her so often. What I fear most is that my sons will not be worthy to carry on this great work."

Ashbourne replied that this aim was noble and great, but that he himself was born in another country, and nursed in a different religion, which he could not leave. The King of England had declared himself the head of the faith in his own country, which had been the cause of the death of many good men. Akber listened attentively to Stephen's account of Henry VIII.,

* This was in the year of the Hejira 1009. The millenium of Islam was completed on the 9th October, 1591.

observing that much of the mischief seemed to be owing to the king's not being willing or able to take more than one wife at a time. How absurd to limit a king to one wife, when he is anxious to have an heir to the throne! And now you say that the princess, his daughter, who rules over your nation, refuses to have a husband, which will let a strange dynasty in to rule over you.

Akber then asked some further questions about the English king, which led our hero to tell him of the fate of Sir Thomas More and of his "Utopia." This latter topic amused the emperor, who made Ashbourne repeat what he remembered of the ideal commonwealth.

The emperor then abruptly asked Stephen if he thought that India was well governed. As Ashbourne hesitated to answer, he said, "I plainly see that you do not think it is. Tell me what you really think."

Ashbourne said he thought that the people were overtaxed, that the revenue system seemed too well contrived to exhaust all the wealth of the country, to enrich the governors of the provinces; the Court was great and splendid, but on too great a scale of magnificence to allow the people to be prosperous.

The emperor listened to all this with extreme surprise. On dismissing our hero, he said, "No one has ever told me anything like this. However, it may be you are a straightforward man. I think I must give you a jaghir, when you will govern it in your own way, and no doubt shut out all evils."

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNEXPECTED PROPOSAL—DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY—AN ELEPHANT FIGHT.

SEVERAL days after, Hakim Ali came to Ashbourne's house with a message from the emperor, which he introduced with studious delicacy.

"His highness," said Ali, "thinks very favourably both of your knowledge and skill, and desires that you should always remain in his service, but a single man is unsteady and inclined to wander. Why do you remain alone in the world? Through the providence of the emperor you will obtain a wife worthy of you, and his highness will be encouraged to bestow upon you still greater marks of his favour and affection."

"Truly, Hakim," replied Ashbourne, "I should be satisfied to find a maiden whom I could marry, but I cannot take to either the religion of Mahomet or the Divine faith of your sovereign. I still remain a Christian, and our law forbids us to be yoked to one of a different creed."

"Is this your only objection?" asked the Hakim.

Ashbourne reflected a minute; none other occurred to him, and thinking the objection was too good to be overcome, he said that he had no other. In truth he had never considered the subject. Since he left London he had never actually conversed with any woman he could marry, save Madame Regnier, the wife of a French artist at Agra. He knew that his Mahomedan friends had mothers, wives, and sisters, but he never saw them, and scarcely ever heard them alluded to. At the Court of Akber female society certainly existed. There was an immense enclosure in which was the seraglio, and the ladies outside went in and out to visit each other, and even gave entertainments; but, as in all Mahomedan countries, men were totally excluded from the society of all respectable women save those of their own families. The question of Ali stirred up a thousand thoughts in Ashbourne's mind. Through the whole of the next day he could not keep himself from musing over delightful visions of fair Mussulmanis, soft, lovely, and gentle. Perhaps he had been too rigid in refusing to wed with any of them, perhaps after all it would be easy to convert them to a better religion. Some of the men who had followed Ashbourne's fortunes had, after the manner of sailors, formed attachments of an irregular character, though scarcely intended to be of a durable nature. Ashbourne had remained without forming any connection. His thoughts were still busy with a subject always seductive to a young man, when a few days after Hakim Ali returned with the air of an envoy who has something

of importance to announce. "The emperor," he said, "had heard Ashbourne's reply, and thought it wise and prudent. His majesty does not approve of a disregard to the difference nor disparity of rank, and as he took a fatherly interest in Ashbourne, he had afforded the subject his royal consideration. There was in his palace a maiden named Irene, the daughter of an Armenian who had occupied a high post in the emperor's service. Both her father and mother were now dead, and her brothers, who were idle fellows, had squandered all her inheritance; but the Badsha through his own bounty would provide her with a suitable *kabeen*, or dowry, to bestow her on Ashbourne, if he were willing to marry her." This proposal caused our friend much perplexity. But the Hakim assured him that an immediate reply was due, so with expressions of gratitude for the flattering kindness of the Badsha, he declared that he was well content, as the maiden was of such honourable parentage, to take her to wife, but that as it was the custom in his own country to make certain whether the damsel was well disposed to marriage, he would be overjoyed if he were allowed to converse with her and ascertain her pleasure in that matter. The Hakim considered this unreasonable. "Why should the maiden have any objection when the Badsha himself chose her a proper husband?" In his opinion such objections should not be regarded, nevertheless the great Akber, whose kindness was without equal, might consider the consent of the bride to be necessary; but of course this could be made sure

without Ashbourne seeing her. Such a thing was quite against the customs of the Armenians as well as of the Hindustanis.

“But in my country,” observed Stephen, “the young men select their wives from those they like best, and this is a privilege I do not desire to give up entirely.”

“It seems to me,” rejoined the Hakim, “that choosing in such important matters is no privilege. Nothing makes people so unhappy as when in important matters they have chosen wrongly. It is only by thinking that it could not have been otherwise that mortals can reconcile themselves to the blows of fate. Surely men are fortunate when events save them the distraction of choosing, the miseries of indecision, and the self-reproach of having made a wrong choice. Than this there is no greater torment. Men are generally satisfied with their mothers, and would have no other woman for a mother; in the same way men are or ought to be satisfied with the wives their parents provide for them. Your own father has not lived long enough to provide you with a wife, and when so wise a prince as Akber gives you the benefit of his pre-eminent judgment, you do not seem to be grateful for such a surety against error.”

“But,” said Ashbourne, who was scarcely prepared to reply to views so entirely novel, “we in England like best to marry the woman we fall in love with.”

“I understood you said just now,” replied the Hakim, “that you liked to be allowed to choose the woman you would marry, but in falling in love with a

woman, you lose the power of choice, and the faculty of seeing things as they are. Beware of such a passion, my friend. Love is like a thorn in a man's foot, he cannot even get rid of it without pain. A prudent man will hardly love a woman before he marries."

About seeing the lady in question, he, the Hakim, did not believe that the Court, meaning no doubt the royal ladies in the palace, would allow such a flagrant piece of indelicacy as a woman showing her face to a man in the hopes of getting him for a husband, and perhaps being rejected after all. Surely he must fear that the emperor had chosen some one not worthy of him.

Ashbourne saw that if he insisted more on such a demand, it would merely be regarded as a refusal, perhaps an insult. The question must be answered, yes or no, and that without any further delay, and so he, with great misgivings, allowed Hakim Ali to bear back an answer in his own words.

"Was any Englishman," thought he, "thus bound, blindfolded, and led like a victim to the altar?" It reminded him of the laws of Lycurgus by which every Spartan was obliged to select his wife from amongst all the marriageable females shut up in a dark room. At the same time the thing had some relieving points, the destitute condition of the young lady interested his chivalrous feelings. She was, like him, a stranger amongst the strangers; moreover the emperor himself was a man of refined taste, who would not, he felt confident, send him a wife destitute of attractions. It is difficult, however, for one brought up in Europe to

rest on generalities in an affair of this kind. After reflecting profoundly a happy idea struck Stephen, and he immediately started up to carry it out. He knew that Madame Regnier was in the habit of paying visits to ladies living within the vast circuit of the harem, and had besides a large female acquaintance in Agra—perhaps she knew this Armenian damsel. At anyrate, she could find out something about her, so he rode away to her house to put her up to the errand, though it must be confessed he went slower and slower as he approached her dwelling-place. The Frenchwoman showed much unfeeling amusement at his perplexity. She thought it was useless making any inquiries; as his doom was sealed it would merely take away the pleasure of an agreeable surprise, or bring a little sooner the pain of a disappointment.

“Very well,” said Ashbourne, “I know you are entirely without curiosity, and so I hope you will make no inquiries at all.”

Madame however admitted that she did feel curiosity, and it was quite possible that she might make some inquiries; but she would show a wise discretion in communicating anything about the *fiancée*. Ashbourne went away, as he knew she was eager to commence. He called back next day to hear the result, which, after a little persiflage, he was permitted to do. The young lady was white; she was about eighteen years of age, remarkably beautiful; her temper was very sweet. She was accomplished, and wrote verses in the Persian language. It was her constant attachment to the

Christian religion alone, which prevented her from being married long ago. Ashbourne was still dissatisfied. "What could you have?" asked Madame Regnier. Owing to the difficulties of female etiquette she could not visit her at the time, but her information could be relied upon.

The negotiation went on through Hakim Ali, and then the damsel's brothers became interested in the affair. They were young men, fond of vapouring about in lace pugaries, and splendid robes, with jewelled swords and other appurtenances of an Indian dandy. They professed to be Christians of the Nestorian Church, but their religion seemed entirely confined to the observance of a few trivial ceremonies, and a complete independence of all the moral obligations laid down by the Mahomedan and Hindu religions. They declared themselves highly pleased that their sister should be united to a Christian; but hoped that she would never eat pork. They wished that the marriage should be deferred till a bishop of their own Church, who was expected, should arrive at Agra, to solemnise the union with all the ceremonies practised by the Armenians. That dignitary, however, did not appear; the truth was that he had reached Ormuz, but had been prevented from continuing his journey any farther by the opposition of the Jesuits there, who, desirous to gain over or hold in the Romish Church the ancient Christians of St. Thomas, were anxious to cut them off from all communion with any clergy of their own sect. It was quite natural that this unexpected delay much

increased Ashbourne's desire to look upon the object of his waking dreams. He sought to console himself by opening a correspondence. He wrote in the best Arabic characters which he could form, a love letter, which, not being thought legible enough, had to be copied by a native scribe, who insisted upon making unjustifiable changes, which he treated as necessary embellishments. Perhaps the lady's answer to this letter was well-meant. It might be translated as follows:—

“The letter of your Highness afforded much consolation to his handmaid, who sends to the noble warrior blessings and greeting. Every day does she bless the goodness of the Emperor, who has been pleased to make so illustrious the path of life of your handmaid. It is her hope that she may be able to add to the happiness of your Highness. The news that the Bishop of Van has not succeeded to get a ship for India, has caused her the most excessive uneasiness. It is her cherished hope that he,” &c.

This was hardly the style which a contemporary of Shakspeare and Spenser would be ready to accept of in a love letter. Our hero made up his mind to write his own letters, and to reject grandiose phrases, and after the exchange of a few more missives their correspondence began to assume a more natural style. I have no doubt that his essays in the native language were full of grotesque turns of expression. The letters of an Indian in English are generally an amusing production, and no doubt the attempts of an Englishman to write Hindustani must often afford mirth to natives who have a taste for the ludicrous. In the course of this

interesting correspondence, now lost along with the greater part of the *Livy* and the verses of *Archilochus*, Ashbourne took occasion to insist with much fervour that his mistress ought to send him a specimen of her poetical skill, which, after repeated solicitations, came at last. A fragment of the MS. is still extant, written in Persian. As this would not be readily understood by many of our readers, the author has tried to render it into English verse, though it suffers much in translation :—

“Tell me why the dull cuckoo,
On the mountains all day long,
By the thickets hid from view,
Pours her melancholy song.

“Now to seek her and console her,
And their little counsels bring,
When the sultry day is over,
Fly her comrades of the wing.

“ ‘Stupid,’ said the nightingale,
‘Could you only sing like me,
You would see a flight of suitors
Fluttering round your chosen tree

“ ‘Little care I,’ cried the peacock,
‘Should I hold it in my choice,
To exchange my poorest feathers
For the sweetest warbling voice :

“ ‘For I know our gorgeous plumage,
In camp and palace may be seen,
Waving o’er the heads of sultans,
And fanning the repose of queens.]

“ ‘ Oh, my sister,’ spoke the maina,
 ‘ Learn to chatter Islam’s creed ;
 Then you ’ll perch in golden cages,
 And from golden saucers feed.’

“ ‘ Say not so my dearest sisters,’
 Softly fluttering coo’d the dove ;
 ‘ ’Mongst themselves men seek for wisdom,
 But without they seek for love.

“ ‘ Never-ending repetition
 Tires the ear to sweetest song,
 And the brightest colours dazzle,
 When the eye regards them long.’

“ ‘ Then the cuckoo answered sadly :
 ‘ Truly ’twere a foolish game,
 Should I play at being like you,
 When I could not be the same.

“ ‘ Vainly do you seek to soothe me
 By preaching on some easy thought ;
 Dream not that the bliss I covet,
 Can be found by being sought.

“ ‘ All the sultry days of summer,
 Silent, pensive, shall I wait,
 Till there cometh some one like me
 Wearying to have a mate.’ ”

It took our hero as long to arrive at the import of this production, as a scholar to reach by dint of lexicon the humour of a joke of Aristophanes. He learned that a maina was a little bird on the hills, which could be taught to speak, and was sometimes made to learn off

by heart the creed of Islam. He gathered that the meaning of the poem was to express the feelings of strangeness in a foreign land which he himself felt, and which went to establish a bond of sympathy between them. In this extremity, Ashbourne, after consulting with Benedict de Goes, determined to request that the marriage rites should be performed by one of the Fathers of St. Paul. This request was made in a formal manner to Jerome Xavier. The Father listened very gravely, and after putting some questions to Ashbourne, said that he would like to be able to know the religious views of the other contracting party. For this purpose it was agreed that the priests should be allowed to converse with the lady, without, however, seeing her face unveiled. After a few days he sent his answer, that though both parties were nominally Christians, they were without the pale of the Holy Catholic Church, and marriage was one of her sacraments. After some further parley, Jerome Xavier said that he would consent to solemnise the marriage if Ashbourne would publicly confess that the Pope was the lawful head of the Christian Church. As Ashbourne could not do this, he was obliged to submit to the mortification of a refusal to his request. Whether it was a reasonable one or not, we have no time to consider, but the Englishman expressed his exasperation in such a very outspoken manner, that it led to a rupture between him and Benedict de Goes, who had up to this time been on friendly terms with him. The affair made sufficient noise among the courtiers to come to

the ears of the emperor, who took the earliest opportunity to question Father Xavier about it.

"I see you have two sects in Europe who hate one another more than the Shias and Soonis. How comes it that you go to seek converts in foreign countries when you cannot make the people of Europe of one mind upon matters of religion?"

"Under the candle there is darkness," replied the Jesuit Father, quoting a well-known proverb. "Such is the perversity of the human heart that men shrink away from the light, even when it is purest, seeking dark places which may favour evil-doers. All this comes from men trusting to reason alone, for by pure reason man can convince himself of nothing, not even of his own existence, so that philosophers have thought that life is nothing but a series of pictures or illusions."

"How then," said Akber, "do you expect to bring men over to your faith?"

"Truly," said the Father, "all things have a natural turn to fit with the truth. Only men's minds must be so disposed to see it. This is the gift of God, and, when they once see the true relations of things, they will not be again deluded by false doctrine or the sophistries of error. For five years we have followed your majesty's Court over the hot plains, across the mountains to Cashmere, and now with your armies in the south. We have done all this in the hopes of leading a great prince to the truth, and that we should be thought worthy of being the means of saving your soul.

Now we begin to despair, for, though you seem to seek the truth, you have not the good fortune to find it. We begin now to think that we are living here in pure loss, and that better fruit might be reaped if we sowed our seed in other lands. We hear that Fathers of our company have reached the capital of China, and that, in the distant islands of Japan, numerous converts are being made to the faith, and many princes and nobles have been baptised."

During this harangue, Akber was inspecting his elephants, of which he had nearly 6000. Some of them were led before him day by day to observe their condition. He was fond of conversing with the foreign priests, and had no desire they should leave his Court, as Rodolf Aquaviva and the priests of a former mission had done, and so he gave a conciliatory answer.

"I have great reverence for the founder of your religion, and a few days ago got my secretary to read to me the 'Bridge of Life' which you wrote in Persian. Only, being a strict Mussulman, there were some passages which much displeased him."

It is strange that, though fond of literature and history, and delighting in the company of learned men, Akber himself could not read, but employed men with fine voices to do so, who were paid so much a page.

"I cannot yet think," said the philosophical emperor, "that all truth is contained in any one faith, but I am willing again to weigh your words."

"It is my hope," said the Father, "that your majesty

will allow me to have an interview either alone or with some members of your family."

"Surely, Father," replied Akber, "the company of a few learned men will add to the wisdom of our conversation."

This was very distasteful to Jerome Xavier, who saw clearly that the freethinking emperor wished to have another of the fruitless controversies in which he had already borne a fatiguing part. Nevertheless he found it impossible to refuse, and so the emperor allowed him to depart with the understanding that he was to come with Father Pigneiro to one of these conclaves on the following evening.

"Now," said the emperor to his secretary, "tell Hakim Ali to bring with him Ashbourne, the young English artilleryman, for I must hear what he has to say about the difference between him and the padres, and also invite Sadr Jahan the Mufti, and Puzu Khotam the Vedantist, and Rupram the Jain, and Ahsan Ullah the Mulvi, Asof Khan the historian, Abdul Kadir the translator, Nauranjeer the Farsi, and Tansen the musician, so that he may help to bring all to harmony."

The versatile prince then turned his attention to his elephants. "Abrup, the new elephant from Pegu," said he, "is strong and fierce, but it is my hope that Giran will be able to match him. Where is Duda? Let us see if he is in good condition."

A large Ceylonese elephant was then brought and minutely inspected, the mahout being praised for keep-

ing him in such good condition. It was then arranged that Duda should be *Tabanchah*, that is, he should be held ready to come to the assistance of the elephant which was worsted in the combat, if the victor should maul him too heavily. Soon after the fight took place at the river front before the palace walls, the emperor looking on from a balcony with his favourite grandson, Khurram, afterwards the Emperor Jehan. His generals and courtiers occupied different points of view, and a large crowd of the idle people of Agra gathered on the strand. The only creatures that were not anxious for the combat were the elephants and their drivers. The mahouts knew too well the extreme danger they were put to, for the elephant had often sense enough to see the advantage of striking off the man who guided the opposing quadruped, and they were sometimes torn or trampled to death. On this account there were always two drivers mounted, one to replace the other. The wives and children of the poor mahouts were amongst the crowd, deploring the unhappy fate which had fallen on their husbands and fathers, but very little attention was paid to them by the crowd eager to see the fight. A mud wall about six feet high and three broad was between the two opposing animals, and the elephants were urged forward until they met. It was some time before the heavy beasts could be roused to anger, but when at last they came to fight, they gave each other dreadful blows and wounds with their trunks, heads, and teeth, roaring and trumpeting during the pauses of the combat. They were led back again and again,

their fury rising with the shouts and excitement of the crowd. At last the Pegu elephant broke through the mud wall, struck off the drivers, and fairly overpowered Giran, whom he threw down and commenced to maul. The other elephant was then ordered up to assist Giran, but was not able to cope with Abrup. The guards ran with lighted crackers to separate the combatants, but the Pegu elephant was too excited to be deterred. He turned upon the guards, who made a narrow escape by running as hard as they could, to the great amusement of the crowd. Abrup then fell upon his two opponents, who saved themselves by running into the Jumna. This caused a great excitement; two of the drivers were very severely injured, and the generosity of the emperor was much praised, who gave them all a handsome present for their courage and conduct. It seemed a part of Akber's character that, though so humane that he did not like to have animals killed for food, and hated the sight of a butcher, he was extremely fond of setting them to fight. In fact, we might make up quite a list of beasts whom he used to set to fight, from elephants down to spiders.

CHAPTER XII.

A RELIGIOUS DISPUTE—BEHIND THE SCREEN.

THOSE who had been asked to take part in the battle of words were not invited to the palace, but to a house situated within a garden in the suburbs of Agra. The disputants were conducted into a hall which formed part of the building. There was a dome on the roof, from the windows of which the light descended. There were also high windows on one of the sides of the square apartment, and the opposite side was separated from the rest of the house by glass doors, covered with chinks, or hangings composed of thin rods tied together. There was no furniture in the room, save a carpet and square mats. Akber sat in the middle with his secretary and reader beside him, and the company occupied mats, with their backs to the wall.

The emperor opened the discussion with a speech upon the beauty of truth, and the advantages which men would gain if they were agreed in religious matters. He said that when he sat to transact public business, he was obliged to assume state in order that his

authority might be supported, but that here he regarded himself as a private person, and wished to be treated without form or ceremony. He then asked the Father Jerome Xavier to give his views, which he did in a missionary harangue, mainly directed against the Mussulman religion. This exasperated the Mahomedans present so much, that it was only the authority of the emperor that prevented the Father from being borne down by interruption. The emperor himself seemed to listen to the Father's attack with complacency. When he said that Mahomet was a man who wished to pass himself off as a prophet,

"Then," said Akber, "he was not a prophet?"

"No, sire," answered the Father, "he was not a prophet; no doubt he was a false prophet."

The emperor smiled, while all the Mussulmans present looked furiously at the Father, but Hakim Ali and other freethinkers did not put themselves about any more than the Hindus and Parsees. The emperor's reader remarked in a low voice that what the padre said was false, and that the coming of Mahomet was prophesied in the Christian's gospels. Encouraged, however, by the countenance of Akber, Jerome Xavier continued to attack Islam, till the reader, who was a Mulvi, cried out that they ought not to listen to such blasphemies, and at length fairly burst out of the room. The Sadr being asked his opinion, declared that the truth did not seem to him to lie in any particular religion, but something valuable might be extracted from them all, and took occasion to recommend the new form of faith formu-

lated by the Emperor Akber himself, and Faizi, the brother of Abul Fazl, who was now dead. Akber then asked Hakim Ali to speak. The physician was a materialist, and a complete disbeliever in all forms of religion, though from prudential reasons he was cautious in letting his views be known. Instead of supporting Sadr Jahan, which he might have done through complaisance, he delivered a telling reply to those parts of the harangue of the Jesuit missionary, in which he recommended the Catholic faith. He had said that the Mahomedan religion was spread by the blood of victims, while Christianity was spread by the blood of martyrs. He gave an account of the massacre of St. Bartholomew and the cruelties of the Spaniards in Flanders, and their vindictive oppression of the Moriscoes in Spain. He asked if the Mahomedans did any thing of the like, and called upon Ashbourne to attest these contemporary events. Our hero had up to this time preserved a guarded neutrality towards the Jesuit missionary, thinking that the twilight of Catholicism was better than the darkness of heathenism. Being now irritated against the Father, for a reason already explained, he seconded the attacks of his friend Hakim Ali, and took occasion to denounce the corruptions which the Popes had made upon the purity of the gospel.

As he was by no means accustomed to debate in public even in his own language, his recommendation of Protestantism made little impression. The discussion was continued for hours, to the great enjoyment of the

emperor. Nothing, of course, was decided; but Jerome Xavier and Pigneiro had a hard time of it between Mahomedanism, Brahminism, Protestantism, and Deism. The two Fathers departed, talking in their holy and bitter way against the English heretic.

“It is true,” observed the Father Pigneiro, “that we ought to love our brethren, but we are told at the same time to love them in the truth, and a heretic like this, who tries to shipwreck the souls of men, is the enemy of God and man. Is it not true that you yourself, reverend Father, tried to convert him to the truth when he came asking you to marry him to that Armenian woman, and did he not turn away scornfully from your words?”

“I found the Armenian damsel much more likely to be compliant,” replied Jerome. “She may one day be turned to the faith, but the Englishman is obstinate in his hatred of the truth. Do you not think,” went on Father Jerome, “that if we had consented to marry them, it would have been better than making him an enemy? The maiden is said to be clever and alluring, and great triumphs to the faith have been made through such instruments. Though at the time it seemed to me that he would be more likely to drag her into his heresy than yield to any influence we might exert through her disposal to our instruction.”

“We had little need of any new stories against us,” said Pigneiro. “The people say that we are sorcerers, who live upon human flesh, and there is an Arab in Agra who says that I killed his brother, cut off his head, and

took the teeth of some unknown bird, for I suppose known birds have no teeth, and that I made a charm, by which we bewitch people to become Christians. The emperor, at anyrate, will not heed such tales, but this fellow will fill his ear with his pestilent stories. Never can we expect to be treated with the same honour at Court as before." To this Xavier replied, "But still might we not, as Benedictus advised, try once more to convert this young man to the faith? I have always thought to remove obstacles from my way by gentle means."

"Remember," replied Pigneiro, "the saying of the Pope under whom our order was founded—'A heretic never returns. The only remedy is the fire.' If this man be not removed from our way, the cause of the faith, the object of our coming hither, will suffer grievously."

"But," replied Xavier, "how can we get rid of him? I already tried to induce the emperor not to keep the man in his service, but in vain, for he found that he was skilful in war. I fear much that a knowledge of the faith will never be granted to Akber. Formerly it was Abul Fazl, and now this Englishman will hold him back. Our hope lies with the Prince Selim, who hates Abul Fazl, and is much more likely to listen to our words than his father, who amuses himself with getting us to dispute before him, as he sets the elephants to fight."

During the evening's discussion, which Ashbourne had found mortally tiresome, his glance had often wandered round the room, resting for a moment on the chick or screen, his attention was arrested by a bright reflec-

tion, which clearly came from a necklace of diamonds, by the falling of the breast on which they were worn. By the help of the light which they returned from the lamps, he could make out a female face and figure, and a pair of quick black eyes watching the assembly. He amused himself by furtively watching, which he could do all the more safely, that no one else seemed to have noticed the figure behind the screen.

After the discussion was over, Akber waited till all the disputants had gone away, when he crossed the apartment, raised the screen, and found himself in the arms of the wearer of the diamond necklace, a tall, handsome Circassian woman, with an intelligent expression, who said abruptly—

“Well, you have had a long discussion. What have you decided?”

“I am willing that you should act as umpire,” replied the emperor, smiling.

“Ah, I wonder your majesty would spend so much time with these unbelievers. It seemed to me as if their talk would never end, and there was something which I wished to tell you, and brought me away from the screen and back again so often. Kalil is ill; he has fever.”

“We should not have let the Hakim go.”

“I do not want him. He is a very Herod amongst children,” replied the lady. “Come yourself to see him. The sight of your majesty will do him good.” Akber went with her to a room where a beautiful boy, about eight or nine years of age, was lying on some soft mats,

tossing about uneasily. The emperor bent over him, and gently put his hand on his soft cheek.

“It is ague,” he said. “Give him some *kathkaringa*—it will pass away.”

“I am afraid,” she said, “that some one has given the fever to him. They say that if one takes the dark, rotten water from a swamp, and pours it on the floor, that it causes fever.”

“O Begum,” replied Akber, “what strange notions come into your mind. Who would seek to injure the child?”

“Many,” said the mother, sadly; “were he the son of a poor man he might sleep in safety.”

“Why do you talk like this?” replied Akber; “who should be his enemy?”

The lady was silent, and as if answering her thoughts, the emperor went on—“The brothers and sisters in poor houses love one another, and grow up clinging together, but the children of sultans and kings are born to be enemies. I would fain live till this boy becomes a man, so that his future might be made sure. Of what use is power when one cannot prolong his life for a day, though it were to save an empire? This thought gives me pain, that there is no one to come after me fit to carry on my work in India. Would that this boy had the strength to take up my load!”

“Oh, no! he cannot. That is what I fear,” exclaimed the mother. “It is power that makes men do bad actions. Men like you only come once in a thousand years. I would not have my son seated on the throne

red with the blood of his kindred. Speak not of it. The very whisper of such a thing might be death to him."

"Yes, I know of what you are thinking," said Akber. "Selim and his sons, Khusru and Parviz, who already hate one another, and seek to gain my ear to do harm, father to son, and son to father, and brother to brother. I have not forgotten my uncle Camran,* into whose power I twice fell when a child. But his fate is too painful to think upon. I know it deeply grieved my father to think of it."

"Surely your majesty, out of your thoughtfulness, will make provision for the boy, and for your little

* After many acts of treachery and hostility, Camran was at last delivered up to Humayun by a chief of the Gakkars with whom he had taken refuge. The emperor at first received his brother graciously, but after two days it was determined that he should be blinded. For the rest we may use the words of Mountstuart Elphinstone. The author of the *Memoirs*, having been ordered to attend on the prince, describes the particulars of his misfortune. "At first no person was willing to undertake the duty, and the king had given the order just as he was setting off on his march. One officer rode after him, and told him in Turki the difficulty that had arisen, on which the king reviled him, and asked why he had not done it himself? On the officer's return the order was made known to Camran, with many expressions of sorrow, and the operation was performed by piercing his eyes repeatedly with a lance. Camran bore the torture without a groan until lemon juice and salt were squeezed into his eyes, when he called out, 'O Lord, my God! whatever sins I have committed have been amply punished in this world, have compassion on me in the next.'

"Camran, now no longer dangerous, was permitted to go to Mecca, where he soon after died."

daughter, Shahru," said the lady; "I should rather see him the headman of a village in the Caucasus, safe amidst its rocks and precipices, than fighting for the throne of Hindustan. Think of it. Give him some place where he may live secure without trying to rule over men."

"It is difficult," said Akber, "to make a private man of the blood of Timur, but I shall think over it. Only speak no more of it at present, for, indeed, I come here to forget matters of state."

"And, indeed," replied the lady, "it is known to you that I do rarely speak of such things. It is only for the safety of my children that I have spoken."

In his exhaustless desire to play every part in the human life, Akber now and then left his palace to play the idyl of private life with this woman, rough of speech, but sensible, tender, and kind, preferring freedom to grandeur, a wild flower of the Caucasus, with a freshness and fragrance of its own.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRINCE SELIM—HIS BANQUET—AN EASTERN BRIDE.

THERE was much talking in Agra about the intrigues of Selim, the emperor's eldest son. The prince still remained at Allahabad, whence he ruled over all the country to the east with independent power. His father several times summoned him to come to Agra, and the prince, professing to obey, set out with a large force, whose farther march the emperor was obliged to forbid. Neither threats nor friendly invitations would induce the prince to come with a small retinue. Though Akber could have had little reason to dread the result of an armed contest, his feelings as a father shrank from pushing matters to such a painful issue. The old officers and statesmen at Agra supported the emperor, yet, as they saw that in all probability Selim would succeed him, they feared offending a man who might any day become the master of their lives and property. Selim had the credit of being skilful and energetic in war, but was known to be passionate, ferocious, and unforgiving. At last Akber sent one of his wives, Selima Sultana, who had adopted

Selim on the death of his own mother, to Allahabad, in order that she might exert her influence in averting so unnatural a contest. Her mission was successful; Selim came to Agra with a small escort, and was graciously received by his father, who allowed the prince to retain the sovereignty of the provinces beyond Allahabad.

The prince went to visit Ashbourne's batteries, and adopting a gracious tone towards Stephen, said that he would be delighted if he would come to Allahabad to put his artillery on a good footing. Ashbourne replied, with as much politeness as he could muster, that he wished to remain in the immediate service of the emperor. He was somewhat put about when he received a summons to attend a banquet which the prince was giving in the palace set apart for his use. The company, which numbered about a score of people, was very different from the sages who had attended the disputation with the Jesuit missionaries. They were principally young men—Moguls, Afghans, and Indians—very showily dressed. The Armenian, Constantine, the brother of Ashbourne's intended bride, was amongst the guests. The prince assumed a greater air of state than his father had done. At first, indeed, they were all squatted like so many images, with their eyes fixed on the prince, and put the palms of their hands to the ground, and then to their heads, in recognition of the honour of being addressed. Selim was a powerful-looking man, with a head-dress glistening with jewels. Being the son of a Hindu princess, he was darker than his father in com-

plexion. He had overhanging eyebrows, aquiline nose, and somewhat menacing look. He had a moustache, with no beard. He was dressed in a loose spencer and drawers, with a light tunic of very fine muslin. He wore three necklaces, which descended to his breast. He was very gracious to Ashbourne, and asked a great many questions—such as whether there was much snow and ice, what kind of game, in England. He was much concerned to learn that there were no tigers, lions, nor bears, and scarcely consoled when informed that there were foxes, deer, and hares. He exhibited a desire to obtain different kinds of dogs from England.

A number of meats were brought in, cooked in the Indian manner; after this came sweetmeats and sherbet. The prince drank from a flagon which was kept in the hands of a servant who stood near him. As Selim drank he became more and more good-humoured. This confirmed Ashbourne in his suspicions that the liquid with which he was supplied must be wine. The prince remarked that, like his father, he was ready to tolerate all religions, and saw no reason why men should differ about them. He then told the servants to bring in some more flagons of the same liquor, and ordered it to be served to the guests. Some of them received it in a jovial manner, others drank it gravely, and one man, an omrah or judge, implored the prince to excuse him, reminding him that it was forbidden by the prophet. Forgetting his declarations in favour of toleration, instead of respecting the omrah's religious scruples,

the prince himself rose and poured a flagon of wine over the head and shoulders of the unlucky abstainer. He then ordered him to be turned out, amidst the laughter of the other guests. He remarked, looking at Ashbourne, that Christianity was a good religion, since it allowed a man to eat and drink everything he had a mind to; he also observed that those overpious people were great bothers. The other day, at Allahabad, he had sent for a devotee whom he wished to consult about the future; but the wretch had sent word that he might come to him, as he was content to be a saint in his own corner. He (Selim) then sent four men to beat him. Another time he collected about two scores of dervishes from all quarters to come to a banquet. These holy men appeared in their usual rags, when he told them that he would give them all dresses of honour, which he ordered them to put on at once. This they all objected to, but calling in his guard, he made them all be stripped of their rags, and put on their new dresses. Then he ordered all the rags to be collected in a heap and burnt; on searching the ashes a great deal of money in gold and silver was found, which these holy men, in spite of their vows of poverty, had concealed on them. This anecdote was, of course, received with great mirth. The conversation, which was getting pretty free, now turned on the Fathers of St. Paul. Selim asked if he allowed himself to be baptised would the Fathers get him some Portuguese women? remarking that he understood they were very beautiful. Ashbourne replied that if

he became a Christian they might get him one wife, but no more, at which the prince made a face. Shortly after he dropped asleep, on which the company, most of whom were drunk, dispersed to their homes in palanquins, which had been long waiting for them. Ashbourne had made up his mind to keep sober, judging that Selim was a dangerous person. He rode away with Constantine, who told him that the Fathers had had several interviews with his sister, and had been trying hard to get her to unite herself to the Catholic Church, and that a religious woman at Agra saw her every day. He advised that the ceremony should be gone through with as little delay as need be, lest further mischief should take place. Ashbourne was now anxious. Impediments thrown in the way strengthen youthful resolutions. Alone amongst a strange people, his heart longed for some one upon whom it could rest. His ideal aspirations had gathered round this Armenian damsel, about whom he had heard nothing but praise, so near and yet always out of reach. In this affair there was enough of mystery to whet curiosity, enough of poetry to gratify his dreams, and enough of reality to satisfy his reason. He knew the intriguing spirit of the Jesuit priests, and had a sense that they were on the watch to do him an evil turn, and that they were dangerous enemies.

In the course of the week Ashbourne again called upon Constantine, but to his surprise found him much less inclined to press the matter. He attributed this difference to the Armenian being a little drunk on the

previous occasion. He himself was now disposed to be content with as little ceremony as should form a solemn contract, but the opposition to this was on the part of the lady's family. Ashbourne took occasion to press the matter warmly; but the more he did so, the more discomposed the Armenian seemed to be. Two days afterwards our hero was told by Hakim Ali that Selim had been trying to induce the emperor to get him sent away to help in reducing a Hindu fortress in Bundlecund. The physician also said that the prince was scheming to gain him over to take his side in meditated revolt against the emperor; but Ashbourne was not so shallow as to be deluded by his promises. He would not refuse to go to Bundlecund if they really had need of his services there, but since his marriage had been begun by the emperor, he hoped that it would be accomplished before he went away. In the meantime, the emperor's mother died, which he took much to heart; indeed, it was reported that he was seriously ill; but Hakim Ali, who attended him, assured Ashbourne that the indisposition would pass away. About this time Constantine appeared, announcing that he and his brother had considered what Ashbourne had advanced about the advisability of his marriage with their sister taking place at once, and that they were ready to have a ceremony of *nigah* (a verbal and then a written engagement, with the exchange of written promises), performed in his house by one of their own faith, who was not a priest. This piece of news was almost startling; but Ashbourne

assented, all the more that he hated ceremony. He had always thought with dislike of the fuss, romping, and indelicacy of the weddings in Merry England. He also knew how tedious a marriage could be made in India. He was, therefore, not ill-pleased that the ceremony should be somewhat simplified. At Constantine's house Stephen saw his bride for the first time. She was shrouded in a red silken veil, which hung down to her feet.* After the marriage he returned to his house to await the arrival of the bride, who was to be borne in a palanquin, in a grand torchlight procession, with music and dancing. During the evening he had no opportunity of conversing alone with the lady; indeed, he could only see the outline of her figure, and the gleam of her jewellery, through the mist of her long veil. Ashbourne's curiosity was rather heightened than gratified. He longed for the relatives

* Lest any of my readers should think this narrative more fanciful than real, we quote the following passage from the Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montague. Writing of the Armenians in Constantinople in 1718, she observes:—"They are always promised very young, but the espoused never see one another till three days after their marriage. The bride is carried to church with a cap on her head, in the fashion of a large trencher, and over it a red silken veil, which covers her all over to her feet. The priest asks the bridegroom whether he is content to marry that woman *be she deaf*, be she blind? These are the literal words, to which having answered *yes*, she is led home to his house, accompanied with all the friends and relations on both sides, singing and dancing, and is placed on a cushion in the corner of the sofa, but her veil is never lifted up, not even by her husband."—Letter XLII.

to be come and gone, when he might clasp the lovely stranger to his breast, hear her voice in answer to his own, and learn the secret of her deepest affections.

The house seemed to be very empty till she came.

He amused himself talking with Hasmat. The marriage evidently did not give her any pleasure.

"The lady will beat me and turn me out of doors," said she.

"Why should the lady do that?" asked Ashbourne.

"Out of jealousy," replied the child, looking him calmly in the face. "Do you think she will like to find a lady already in the house?"

"Why, you are only a child."

"But from being small, I will become big," persisted Hasmat; "you will see she will want to put me away."

"Do not be afraid, I shall not let anybody put you away; but you must not rush about and dash the screens as you sometimes do."

"Yes; she will say that I break and destroy everything in the house," persisted Hasmat, "and then you will believe her rather than me, and she will gain your consent to turn me away."

At last Hasmat ran into the room, saying that the Armenian lady was coming. She was borne into the courtyard in an elegantly gilt palanquin, followed by a number of servants. She alighted in the apartments put aside for her. Hasmat ran to and fro.

"The lady has come," said she to Ashbourne. "This is her *pandan*," showing an elegant silver box which she had taken from one of the servants. For the first

time he heard the sweet voices of women in his own house. Ashbourne was in a state of bewilderment.

He entered the apartment. She was standing surrounded by her handmaids, a tall figure wrapped in white garments, with a gauze veil over her head and face. She stood mute and motionless. Stephen gently pulled the veil from off her head, and disclosed a beautiful face, oval, with bright black almond-shaped eyes, with the glow of health upon her soft cheek. Her figure was tall, handsome, and graceful, with that pleasing roundness of form which betokens ripe womanhood. Her thick black hair, arranged in the Roman fashion, was radiant with gold, diamonds, and pearls. Especially conspicuous on her head was a flower like a marigold, made up of jewels and gold. There were jewels everywhere, clusters of ear-rings round her ears; three necklaces of different colours descended over her breast. There were half-a-dozen of bracelets on each arm, rings on every finger, and bangles on her ankles. Gold balls slung upon silver wire hung round her waist. The voluptuous character of her beauty was heightened by her dress and adornments. Ashbourne gazed for a minute without speaking. She slowly looked up with her dark eyes, with a deeper expression than he could fathom, then she cast them down, and looked up again, as if every time to add something to her knowledge of him, and with a beseeching smile she said, "Are you pleased?"

Did his thoughts wander for a little to the light-haired, blue-eyed maids of Merry England, from whom

he had turned for this dusky-cheeked, dark-haired woman, in her Eastern beauty and mystic ornaments, so foreign and so familiar, a stranger and yet his wife? If his thoughts did so wander, they soon came back to the actual. Her presence filled the room. Yes, he was pleased, fascinated with a charm he had not dreamt of. A real image replaced his dreams; only the reality was not the same as his dreams. But is this not the history of human life?

CHAPTER XIV.

WITHIN THE ZENANA—GOSSIP FROM THE SERAGLIO.

IT is often said that people never know one another's character till they are married, and come to live together. Certainly this was true in the present case. Ashbourne soon began to know a good deal of the character of the Eastern lady who had under such strange circumstances become his wife. She regarded her husband with a certain amount of dread and shyness, which soon passed away. She seemed unaffectedly pleased with her new situation. A constant gaiety seemed a part of her nature. She gave pleasure because she had a rich spirit of enjoyment. She had a voice fine in tone, easily modulating itself to the passing emotions. Ashbourne told her he had taken little pains to furnish her rooms in a way worthy of her, as he thought she might do it herself when she came. She thanked him with great ceremony.

“You are very mindful. Since you from your nobleness give me permission, I shall take up the work myself.” She kept her word. A number of native traders soon appeared to exhibit their wares, she sitting

behind the screen criticising the wares and prices in a loud voice to the attendants.

“Is Naggr Mull not ashamed to ask twice the value for that brocade? Does he think me so stupid as not to see his silk is mixed with cotton? Tell the bunea to go away with his raw dyes. People will never buy anything from him till they become blind.”

She beat down their prices with amazing skill, and saw everything paid, looking through the screen. Evidently she had a good eye for decoration. She soon got her apartments to assume a new air. The naked walls were clad with hangings, the floors covered with fine carpets and richly-embroidered mats, the room filled with perfumes. She passed the whole day dressing herself, bathing, eating, chewing pan, talking, laughing, singing, or playing on the lute. She was lively, intelligent, with a subtle satirical vein. Having lived both within and without the seraglio, her sketches of Eastern life had a vivid realism which now and then startled Ashbourne. She could tell all about Akber—his greatness and his weaknesses; his wives, his sons, and daughters; all the gossip and scandals of that so carefully-guarded enclosure. Of Selim she would scarcely speak. Ashbourne asked her about the house at Kossipur, and the mysterious lady whose diamond necklace he had seen through the screen. “That was Akber’s wife.”

“His mistress rather.”

“No, his real wife; he is married to her. He has many wives. He once asked the lawyers how many free-born women a man could legally marry? The

lawyers said that four was the limit allowed by the prophet. 'But,' said Akber, 'I have already married more women than that, and how then could I do justice to them?' These deceitful men, being frightened, said there was a verse in the *Koran*: 'Marry whatever woman you like, two, or three, or four,' which being added together by these clever people made nine. Finding a stubborn old Kazi, Jakub, who would not give in to this sophistry, Akber suspended him, and appointed Sheikh Husain Kazi, before whom he laid his cases, who declared all his wives legal. But about the lady I will tell you all. The emperor is jealous of the people who buy his horses. Of course they cheat him; everybody does. So he used to disguise himself; putting on a false beard, he went out to buy horses, in order to learn the prices that were going. Now there was the widow of a Circassian horsedealer who had got all his property. She wished to sell his horses, but was much cheated by the men in her employment, so she used to sit and watch the bargains they made. She was about twenty-eight years old, tall and handsome and clever. She sat behind the *purdah* when Akber came into the courtyard and wanted a horse. They brought him a fine horse, which was very unruly, and danced about so that no one could mount him; but the newcomer got his foot into the stirrup, and then the next thing they saw he was on the horse's back. The animal flung and backed, but it would not do. The horse-buyer got him out to the plain, and galloped him about till he was quiet. Then he asked the price of

the horse, when he heard the widow giving directions to her people.

“It seems,” he said, “that you do not quite trust your people, and I do not trust mine. Since I have come myself, permit me, lady, to come near and arrange with you.”

So he went up to the screen, and they soon settled about the price. He counted out the money, and offered it to her, when she held out her hand beyond the screen. It is likely he managed to see her face. They say that Akber reads people's character from the face at one glance. Perhaps that is not always possible, but he thinks so. At anyrate, he was pleased with her speech, for he soon came back to buy another horse. He bought horse after horse, always insisting on settling with the lady. This they made very amusing, for she is intelligent and witty. At last he told her that he wanted to marry her. She thought he was some Afghan Amir, but did not know that he was the emperor. She told him that she did not want to marry again. She was rich and independent, and did not want to be shut up in a zenana with two or three more wives and mothers-in-law. Nevertheless, she was pleased with him. At last Akber, whose heart was much moved, agreed to marry her, and to leave her in her house with all her property; but when she knew that it was the emperor, she was dreadfully frightened, and wanted to draw back, but he would not let her, and she was married by the Kazi. He goes to see her at times, and she has two children by him. She will

not let any of the courtiers come near her, and is afraid of being sent into the seraglio. They say Akber is much guided by her advice; and Selim and his sons are very jealous, as they think Akber might try to make the little boy his successor."

Ashbourne thought that Irene might desire to see some of the ladies of the seraglio, within whose walls she had passed so much time; but she always talked with dislike of the idea of going there again; and when some great ladies of the Court sent word that they would come to visit her, she always managed to excuse herself. On some occasions it was patent that she had given offence to her would-be visitors. For this she showed not the slightest remorse. She had seen enough of them, if they did not think they had seen enough of her. She was totally ignorant of European manners. Her profession of Christianity was evidently not founded upon any knowledge of its peculiar doctrines, of some of which she seemed to be strangely ignorant. Of the Fathers of St. Paul she talked with no liking; she was heartily glad they came not here. Her ordinary language was Hindi; but she spoke Persian more or less fluently, and was able to repeat many of the verses of Saadi, and other bards of the same character. She was at first very shy of appearing before Ashbourne's male visitors, some of whom were European artists, but as he exhorted her to change her manners, she consented to appear at some mixed entertainments, and gradually relaxed the shyness of her reserve.

The women whom they brought with them, she could not tolerate, showing a ready jealousy of any familiarity between them and her husband. In the end, most of them ceased to come, though some of Ashbourne's male friends thought her very amusing, being lively, and with a fine flow of spirits and capacity for the ludicrous. Nevertheless, the attempt to cultivate English manners upon this Oriental upbringing did not seem likely to yield good results; indeed, he was soon ready to give it up, and let his wife remain behind the purdah, as was customary with the other ladies of the country. There was a lightness about her speech, manners, and thought which suggested jealousy. The notion of duty did not seem to sit deeply in her mind. She did what pleased her, and apparently for no other reason. Ashbourne traced this to the bad education and bad example she had in the seraglio, and hoped that his precepts would in time make her more dutiful and serious. Though she seemed unaffectedly fond of her husband, he thought that a momentary caprice might turn her inclinations another way. She was skilful in keeping the house cool during the hot weather. She would sleep all day, and wake up in the evening in a very lively manner, showing great skill at getting up entertainments and shows, singing and telling tales, so that Ashbourne was often heartily amused, though sometimes a little exhausted by the constant succession of sensuous images. His nature, somewhat retiring and reflective, began to assert itself, and he began to think that they

ought to commence a more sober life. He found her habits too expensive, and told her that he would soon be at the end of his money. This was not to her taste ; no other state of life seemed to her to be worth having save the one in which she could get everything she desired, and that without delay. The future never seemed to disquiet her so long as she was not compelled to give up the present. When she saw that money was becoming scarcer, she warned Ashbourne to look carefully to the accounts and contracts which passed under his hand, and cautioned him against the cunning embezzlements of his native clerks. In this respect she showed an unexpected shrewdness. She warned him as much as possible to pay everything himself, and to take receipts for what he bought.

At first her brothers appeared very little at the house. Constantine had set up as a merchant, and seemed to be possessed of a good deal of money. After a time he came oftener. This worthy, though he professed himself a Nestorian Christian, seemed to think the full liberty of drinking wine to be the best part of his religion. Though his conversation did not seem to be amusing, still, as he was Irene's brother, Stephen thought it well that she preferred his society to that of any one else, and did not do anything to prevent him coming to the house.

Happy are they who have no shadows following them on their path—the spectres of what might have been—the ghosts of opportunities neglected or rejected. The light step of youth outruns them ; but, as one gets

older, they overtake him. This is what you might have been, had you done this or chosen that, and then you look back and see an image of yourself always brighter, or more famous than the reality.

He now and then received visits from Hakim Ali, who was full of curiosity about the nations of Europe, and delighted in picking up information on all subjects. The physician would sometimes venture to ask, in a kindly way, how he was pleased with his house—the nearest reference to his wife which he would make.

Ashbourne replied that he was pleased. The Hakim renewed his attempts to get Ashbourne to join the Divine faith, which he represented as useful to secure the favour of the emperor. Ashbourne, who doubted much whether Ali was a believer himself, said—

“I regret that, as you are wise enough to see the untruth of the words of the Arabian prophet, you do not have the courage to proclaim what you really think. Are such unbelievers common in Mahomedan countries?”

“There are such men here and there,” said the Hakim; “but they rise alone, like stars in the darkness, and leave neither predecessors nor followers. The few who listen to them sometimes turn back, being happier in their old delusions than in the truth.”

“It is singular,” observed Ashbourne, “that delusions should make people more happy than the truth. Surely the delusion of the multitude must be more akin to truth than the philosophy of the wise.”

“By no means,” answered the philosopher rather test-

ily ; “ I know of some who slumber peacefully in delusion, and yet would not thank any one for revealing to them their true condition.” There was a lurking smile in the eye of the physician, which made Ashbourne imagine that this remark had reference to himself.

“ If you mean my religion,” answered he warmly, “ I could without uneasiness defy you to show it to be a delusion, nor would I thank you the less if you showed me that it was really so. I only regret that the wise men you speak of did not know of it, when they saw the untruth of the false words of the Arabian prophet. Truly I do not believe men will ever be the worse of knowing their true destiny.”

“ Perhaps not, if they could by knowing it make it better,” said the Hakim.

Ashbourne tried to place in a favourable light the beauty of his own religion, without any effect upon the mind of the old sceptic.

“ It is easy,” said Hakim, “ to imagine a fate more agreeable than the real destiny of manhood, but I prefer knowing the truth ; yet it is a melancholy one,” added the sage with a sigh.

“ I would,” he went on, “ that I were freed from the task which the emperor has now put upon me. Being suspicious of the Prince Selim, he put him under arrest at Fathpur Sikri. But the prince passed the time in drinking wine, therefore he has put him under my care. I never knew a confirmed drunkard reform, and indeed it is the vice of his house, save the emperor, the possessor of all the virtues, for his father Humayun, and

his grandfather Baber were both lovers of wine. Nevertheless, this Selim is worse than any in his craving for the wine-cup. I fear much that he, coming to the throne, will not forget that I have had to withhold it from him, and to exercise restraint over him. Indeed I did not seek the charge. Even now he has many to do his bidding through hope of future reward."

CHAPTER XV.

AGAIN TO THE WARS—ABUL FAZL AND BIR SINGH. .

MONTHS had now passed away, when Ashbourne received a message from the emperor, that Abul Fazl desired his presence with the army in the Deckan, to assist in reducing a fortress which stood much in their way and defied all their efforts. Ashbourne heard at the same time that some difficulties had arisen with his old mates who had remained with the army. Of course he had no choice but to obey the order to go to the field of war. He got a promise that after the fortress was taken he should be allowed leave to return to his present quarters, where he naturally determined to leave his wife. Irene showed a lively dislike at the idea of his leaving her.

“So you are tired of me already,” she said, “and want to go away to the war.”

“No, I am not tired of you, my life, nor do I want to leave you, but the emperor wishes me to go to aid in the siege of a place. It is quite an honour to me that they send for me, as if I could put my hand upon it, and take it.”

“Yes, I understand, you wish to plunder some new city in the south—to gain another Hindu mistress. Men are never constant.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you think I have not heard of the Hindu woman whom you took out of Ahmadnagar along with that mischievous Hasmat?”

“Why, I gave her away the same day to her brother.”

“Did you? Well, perhaps you will not be so generous the next time, or brothers will not be so ready.”

Here followed expostulations and explanations not requiring mention. At the end she said—

“If you must go, do not forget to bring me back some jewels. There are very fine diamonds to be had in that country. What is the name of the town? Is it near Golconda? Do not neglect to look for plunder.”

Ashbourne could not say precisely where it was.

“Is the Prince Danyal with the army?”

“No, he believed not. It is said that Danyal has taken so much to drunkenness, that he has been deprived of all authority. Abul Fazl is at the head of the army, with his brave son Abdurrhaman, who, they say, is like the arrow at the top of the quiver, ready for every service. Those who are jealous of Abul Fazl wish the Prince Selim to be sent to command the army.”

On this she changed colour and looked frightened. “You must not go near the prince. Keep out of his way.”

Ashbourne assured her that it was unlikely that the emperor would put Selim in command of the army. In fact it was an idle rumour which he had heard, but did not believe. Nevertheless she repeated these warnings in different words, though she would give no reasons nor explanations.

Next day her brother Constantine appeared. Ashbourne was out when he came. When he entered his house he heard a voice speaking in high tones in Hindi. He heard Constantine's answer.

"I know nothing of it and cannot hinder it. Selim will not be with the army, of that I am sure; but if your husband does not wish to go, let him invent some excuse."

Ashbourne entering the room asked what it was all about.

Constantine replied that as his sister did not wish her husband to go to the Deckan, she had sent for him to get him to be excused, though in that matter he had neither power nor interest.

Ashbourne, who felt pleased by this mark of affection, said that having engaged to go, therefore go he must. He at the same time recommended Constantine to take care of his sister in his absence.

Next day he left to join Abul Fazl, taking two Englishmen and six native horsemen with him. She implored him several times not to go, and when he was going to mount clung to him, and when he left her, her cheek was wet with tears.

In the evening his party stopped at a large serai, the

keeper of which told them with great courtesy that he had accommodation for the native horsemen ; but that the best rooms were taken up, so that he could not give Ashbourne lodgings worthy of him. There was a house near, the owner of which would be willing to honour himself by receiving so renowned a commander. Ashbourne, who did not care for such ceremony, would have been content to take a cell in the serai, where he might sleep till the morning, but he found it impossible to overcome the polite importunity of the custodian. He, therefore, with the two Englishmen and their syces, went to the place appointed—a well-built native house about a mile off. Here he lay down to rest. He did not know how long he had slept, when he awoke full of unquiet thoughts, and looked out into the darkness. He saw an expanse of light slowly spreading over one side of the sky. Concluding it was the first appearance of the morning, he awoke his companions, and told his servants to bring the horses. This they did unwillingly, saying that it was the middle of the night, in fact the light soon faded away. It was the zodiacal light, the false morning, which had deceived him. Nevertheless they determined to push on their journey. They went to the serai and told the horsemen to follow them. When they had joined them in the evening, the horsemen brought the news that the house Ashbourne had slept in had been, a short time after they quitted it, surrounded by dacoits, who, finding that the three Feringhis had gone, went away without injuring any

one. This was startling news. Ashbourne had no idea why he should be singled out for such an attack. He would have liked to have asked why he had been led into a place where he had made such a narrow escape from being killed or taken, but had no means of making inquiry save by turning back, which he was not willing to do. For the rest of the journey he was careful to keep his whole party together.

As relays of horses had already been established on the road, Ashbourne was able in about a fortnight to join Abul Fazl in the Deckan. He met with a kind reception from the general. Those of his old messmates who were still with the army, amounting to about twenty, were overjoyed to see him. Quarrels had arisen between them and the Mogul general, from an attempt to introduce some Portuguese deserters into their corps. Ashbourne was able to make a peaceable arrangement, and it was agreed that, as they were tired of campaigning, the men should be allowed to go to Agra to spend the cold season there. The town they were besieging surrendered shortly after Ashbourne reached the camp. Stephen's service on this occasion was shorter than he expected, for soon after Abul Fazl received a message from the emperor asking him to come to Agra as speedily as he could.

Selim was busily plying his intrigues to supplant him, and had actually gained over a number of grandees, for Akber's free and tolerant spirit had excited the hostility of the Mahomedans without gaining a counterbalancing support from the Hindus.

The emperor felt himself insecure, and wished to have Abul Fazl, whom he could thoroughly trust, again with him. Ashbourne applied to return with the sheikh.

Leaving his son Abdurrhaman to command his army, Abul Fazl set out in the beginning of August with three hundred horse, ordering his baggage to follow. This was during the rains, and travelling was difficult, the whole country being half flooded. When they came to Bundelcund they were warned against a Rajput chief, Rajah Bir Singh, who was said to be assembling troops with a view to attack Abul Fazl's detachment, at the instigation of Selim, who hated Abul Fazl. He was advised to push forward or to fall back upon Antri, where there were 3000 imperial troops. Abul Fazl treated this as a mere scare. He said that in India boldness succeeded best; Bir Singh would be much more likely to attack him if he showed signs of fear. Ashbourne asked Abul Fazl if he feared anything from Selim.

"I should fear him much," replied the sheikh, "were his father not alive, but under the shadow of the protection of the emperor we are safe in every part of his dominions. Nevertheless it would be better if Akber should really know what he is. His partiality to his sons is beyond bounds. The Prince Murad, whom he preferred, is dead; and Danyal is a hopeless drunkard; as for Selim, it is doubtful whether he will be the victim of women or of wine."

As the sun had broken through the clouds for a day, and the moist heat was very trying, Abul Fazl did not

begin his march till late in the day. They had gone a few miles, when they came into one of these weary stretches of jungle still so common in India—broken ground, with bushes in large patches, and trees rising above them here and there, then open spots uncovered by vegetation. It was now about an hour before sunset, and Abul Fazl was lecturing those near him upon the history and the nature of the country, to which the Englishman, being distressed by the heat, paid little attention, when suddenly they heard the boom of a cannon fired in their rear, and, in a minute or two, some horsemen from behind announced that a party of cavalry and matchlock men had issued from the jungle and fallen upon their rear. Abul Fazl promptly stopped his history and moralisings, and gave orders for his horsemen to form together, telling twenty horsemen to ride back to ascertain the strength of the force that had come upon them behind. He had scarcely done so when the Moguls were attacked in front, and a dropping matchlock-fire, with flights of arrows, from both sides of the road, showed that they were in a prepared ambush. Yells from thousands of throats on all sides showed that they were in the grasp of an enemy more than ten times their number. The firing from the bushes so far told that several of Abul Fazl's little squadron fell dead, but as their enemies kept well under cover, the Moguls had little opportunity of returning the fire. The sheikh consulted with Ashbourne, Lasker Khan, and two other well-known soldiers, whether it would be better to push onward or

to cut their way through the force that was in their rear. As they were not sure of the nature of the ground in front they determined to turn back. At the place where they stood, not more than a dozen of them could form abreast. The enemy had already blocked the way by throwing across it some felled trees, but these were not enough to check the rush of the Mogul horsemen, who soon came to blows with their Hindu enemies, light, active, wiry men, upon small horses, armed with spears, and shields upon their bridle arms. The Moguls, who were bigger and more powerful men, and very well mounted, bore down upon their opponents with such force that, had it not been for the Hindus being too close packed to fly, they might have broken through. Presently they were attacked in the rear, and had to face about to defend themselves on every side.

The thickest fighting lay about Abul Fazl, who was again and again singled out for attack by the boldest Hindu combatants. He defended himself with wonderful energy and skill. Several fell under his sword, and others were pushed over by his powerful horse. Ashbourne repeatedly saved him from spear thrusts, which would have gained some unguarded point. Lasker Khan and several other powerful swordsmen helped to guard their chief, and in spite of all the efforts of the Hindus, they made way against the throng, but their numbers thinned as they fought their way on.

Turning aside to oppose a man who made several spear thrusts at him, Ashbourne felt himself surrounded. One man seized him by the leg to pull him off his

horse, another, by an adroit cut, severed the reins on one side of his horse's neck. In this state he received several wounds, and at last was struck off his horse with such violence as almost to lose consciousness. So intense had been the agony of the struggle that it seemed like a relief when it was over. A man holding a spear stood over him, and then, saying something to the rest, turned away with them, no doubt to finish the fray elsewhere. Stephen felt himself swimming in blood, but losing the power to struggle, he sank into an easy state, waiting for his life to end. The tumult around him ceased, or he ceased to hear it, and his thoughts turned back upon the course of his past life, which seemed likely soon to have an end.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER THE BATTLE—A HINDU DEVOTEE—A BUDDHIST
CAVE—AN ABRUPT PARTING.

STEPHEN must have fainted or slept, for when he awoke it was dark and the stars were out ; something touched his face. He put up his hand, when it rested on the muzzle of some beast. Exerting all his strength, he struck it as hard as he could, and uttered a shout. The beast turned away. It was no use troubling itself to overcome the resistance of a living man ; there were plenty bodies around. He felt the unutterable bitterness of helplessness. When would his life be over ? The jackals would disappear in the morning, leaving the crows and the vultures to succeed them. It seemed to him that he heard voices and footsteps, which approached. There was no doubt of it. It was either friends or the enemy returning. They came with torches, the young man who had stood over him ; no doubt they were Hindus. Did they come back to put him to death ? Perhaps to seek for some of their own wounded. To his utter surprise, the group went straight up to him, and then saying some

words which he could not understand, lifted him into a rude litter or hammock, slung on a pole. His eyesight was weak, everything seemed in a cloud. Some men trotted beside the litter.

“Where am I going?” said he in the Hindi speech.

“In a good direction,” the men said.

The hope of life again awoke. Could they be friends, or were they taking him away merely to torment him? The agonising thirst of wounded men distressed him.

“Give me water,” he cried. To his surprise they stopped a little, when a man held out a lotah, but would not let him touch it. They poured some into his mouth. Hour after hour passed away, half in a dream, till they came to broken ground. He heard the first bearer describing the obstacles, so that those stepping behind might shun them. They began to ascend rough ground, presently to climb a slope, for the pole of the litter slanted, and his feet got above his head. So weak was he, that he could scarcely push aside the curtain which hung before him, to observe where they were taking him. After a weary time the party stopped at a small plateau on the side of the hill, near which he saw a large pipal tree, and a Hindu temple.

Stephen’s curiosity was much excited, nevertheless, exhausted by loss of blood and the pain of his wound, he looked on with more indifference to the scene than might have been expected. The leader of the party

approached with profound reverence, and made a low salaam to an old man who issued from a grove. He then pointed to the litter and went away. The old man had the appearance of a gosain, or devotee; his hair was a dirty white; his brown, dried skin seemed stretched over the ribs, which stood out with ghastly distinctness; his withered arms reminded one of the legs of a lean fowl; half his face was whitened with ashes; and his forehead smeared with cow-dung. His eyes had a fixed, dead look—one almost felt surprised when they moved; one tooth remained in the upper jaw to mark that he once had teeth. His only clothing was a covering on his head, and a cloth round his loins. The Brahminical thread hung from his shoulder. They seemed to have a difficulty in making him understand, or making him hear, or both. The saint was reputed to be over a hundred years old. Some paces behind stood a tall, thin man with oval face and high forehead, who assisted in keeping up communication. At length the colloquy seemed over, and they lifted the litter and then laid Ashbourne upon an old tow charpai in an apartment in a half-ruined house at the foot of a steep rock. Two Hindus of lower caste sat down for a little. Ashbourne was lost in bewilderment. Was he a prisoner or a victim? Amongst friends or foes? Had they spared his life to restore him to life and liberty, or to torment him to death? Then a strange idea entered his brain. Were they going to sacrifice him to their false gods?

By-and-by the two Hindus roused themselves and

gave him water to drink ; one went away and returned with some goat's milk. Then, gently lifting him, they washed away the blood which had clotted round his wounds. Ashbourne submitted to this without resistance. He again and again asked them what they meant, but could get no intelligible answer. He noticed the tall Brahmin, whom he had seen on arrival, who looked at the wounds. In reply to Ashbourne's addresses, he said that they meant him well. They brought him some food, and then left him alone. Ashbourne found he had four wounds—a cut in the side under the left arm, a thrust of a spear through the right shoulder, a blow or cut from a club on the back of the head, from which most of the bleeding had come, and a flesh wound in the leg from an arrow. They had washed them with some astringent solution, and then covered them with banana leaves. This was all their surgery. He felt too weak to rise, and soon fell asleep, though the heat distressed him much. During the night he was much troubled by pain and uneasiness from the wounds. In the morning the Brahmin again appeared, and stood immoveable as before. Ashbourne then addressed this personage—"What people are you, and why have you brought me here?"

"It must be known to you," replied the Brahmin, "for you were in the battle, that the Bundela people have fallen upon the force of Abul Fazl and destroyed it."

"What has become of Abul Fazl?"

"Smote to death," replied the Brahmin.

“And why did they come back to carry me away from where I was lying?”

“It was because they say you rescued the sister of Bir Singh at Ahmadnagar, and gave her up to him without injury or ransom. She begged the Rajah to spare you if he could. You see the Hindu people can return a kindness. I am a devotee, and concern myself not with these things, but several days ago I learned from the stars that they would bring a stranger from a far country.”

“Then where are the men who brought me here?” inquired Ashbourne, somewhat bewildered.

“They are gone. They asked me to take care of you. When your wounds are healed you can go from this place.”

Ashbourne expressed his gratitude as well as he could, and said that he hoped one day to make some return.

“This is not what I look for,” replied the Brahmin; “but you may protect our temple if Akber’s people come here.”

“No doubt I shall do what I can,” said Ashbourne; “but what do you do here on this hillside?”

“I attend the gosain at the temple, calling all day on the name of Mahadeo.”

Ashbourne looked curiously at this man. In spite of his uncouth looks and uncared-for person, he was very well made, with a noble and expressive countenance. Though not showing any active benevolence, his demeanour was friendly. Ashbourne perceived that it

was through his agency that he obtained what necessities and attention were bestowed upon him. Fortunately he had some money, which enabled him to procure the attendance of a low-caste Hindu. For two days he was very weak and feverish, as he felt the heat to be oppressive. The Hindu told him that he might perhaps get into one of the caves, if the Brahmin gave his consent. The Brahmin said that in the cave near the temple people came to do worship, but that there was another one farther along the face of the crags, where he was not so likely to be disturbed. They brought some bearers, who carried the wounded man to the place, for he was still so weak that his head swam when he got up, and he could only totter a few steps. The cave was not far off. It had a façade chiselled out of the solid rock, decorated with sculptured figures and ornaments. Two pillars, sloping inwards, marked the doorway, which was half filled up with broken stones, fallen from the crags above. When Ashbourne managed to get in, he found himself in a chamber about fifty feet long, with pillars on each side, with ribbed roof and ornamented capitals. At the end of the chamber or cavern, for it was evidently cut out of the solid rock, there was a carved figure sitting cross-legged, with smaller figures around and below him, in deferential postures, as if listening to a teacher. The cavern was dimly lighted by a semi-circular opening above the entrance. They spread his bedding upon a flat stone, and, though the place was gloomy and depressing, it had this positive advantage,

that it was much cooler than the place he had left. Ashbourne found the Brahmin willing to converse, and after a while he told his whole history. His name was Ananda, his father was a Brahmin soldier, who was killed in battle when Ananda was about five or six years old. The army in which his father had served being defeated and dispersed, the boy ran away to hide in the jungle, where he wandered to the hut of the devotee, who was kind to the child, and kept him by him for two years. The gosain, having a great reputation for sanctity, many Hindus came to his temple for the benefit of his prayers, for their friends who were sick, and for other favours which they desired. Amongst those who came was a rajah, who took a fancy for the Brahmin boy, and wished to be allowed to bring him up, to which the gosain consented. The boy was carefully educated, and as he showed a good capacity he was employed in managing the revenue. Everything went well for some years, till a clerk in whom he had much confidence suddenly died, when a large deficit was found in the treasury accounts, which Ananda was totally unable to make up. Some other collectors in the revenue advised him to conceal the loss, which he refused to do. He revealed the whole deficit to the rajah, being sure of his ability to clear himself of all embezzlement, and suspecting that his advisers had themselves something to do with the missing money. On this they joined together, and forged a number of accusations and implications against him. The Rajah ordered an inquiry into the

matter, which was done in such a faithless or foolish manner that, though nothing was proved against him, everything was confused, and he was unable to obtain the complete justification to which he thought himself entitled. Unable to bear this injustice, and being deeply grieved by the death of his wife in the midst of his troubles, he abruptly left his house, taking nothing with him, and returned to the old gosain. Not long after, another rajah came who was aware of his abilities, and begged the Brahmin to come into his service, but he refused. He had now lived a year with the old gosain, and already gained great reputation as a preacher, and many people used to resort to him on festival days, but the Brahmins around suspected him of heretical tendencies and levelling views. As the old gosain was getting too stupid for anything, he did most of the service of the temple. He would throw water down to wash the idol's footsteps, then sprinkle water thrice to represent the idol rinsing its mouth, then throw flowers over it, and place before the idol trays of food, which were afterwards distributed as its leavings. Then he would lay himself on the ground before the idol, so that eight members should touch the ground—that is, two knees, two hands, the forehead, nose, and cheeks. Then he would stand like a slave, as if waiting for some orders from the idol.

Ashbourne remained in the cave during the heat of the sun, but when the moon came out he tottered to the doorway to look at it, for it seemed like an old friend. When he returned to his bed in the cave, the

indescribable loneliness of the situation seemed to overpower him. His past life went before him, his old home in distant London, his wars in Flanders, his voyage in the *Unicorn*, his dwelling at Agra, his gunners, his wife. Would he see them again? Was his health returning? Was he stronger or weaker? He had said, "In two or three days I shall get up strong and then depart," but weakness still held him in its irresistible grasp.

Feeling weary, he went back into the cave and lay down. He felt a faintness come over him, and suddenly everything round him became dark. Was he dying? The cave was as still as death, but when his agitation abated a little he could see the faint light of the moon from the opening over the doorway. Then a feeble light appeared, and a long, dark figure slowly approached. It was the Brahmin, who had come to converse with him, preferring to do so at night, for his hospitality to the stranger had caused some scandal, and though Brahmins are allowed much latitude in speculation, they are hedged in by strict ceremonials. He found that the lamps which the servant had left in the cave had gone out, which was the cause of the sudden darkness. The Hindu servant would not stay in the cave at night for fear of ghosts. Ashbourne was glad of the company of his strange and uncouth visitor. He took occasion to express his wonder that a man apparently so intelligent should spend his days worshipping a helpless idol. The Brahmin defended his conduct with philosophical calmness. "God," he said, "may be

adored in the heart, in the sun, or in fire, or in water, or in earth, or in the form of an idol. If men can adore God without an idol, it is well ; but some men can only find the real through form. It is through the seen that we arrive at the unseen."

After some further discussion on this subject, Ashbourne turned the conversation on his own weakly condition.

The Brahmin consoled him. His wounds were nearly healed, and he would soon recover from the weakness, when he might go away.

"Truly," said Ashbourne, "it was an evil day when I came to this land. I wonder what was the meaning of the longing which led me to the East."

"No doubt," replied the Brahmin, "in a former state of existence you have lived in India, and are now suffering for what you have done."

"How do you know that?" asked Ashbourne, startled by this somewhat damaging explanation.

"Is it not yet known to yourself in your journeys through India? Have you never lighted on any place where you remember to have been before?"

Such ideas had indeed occurred to the wanderer.

"But if we have lived in these places before, why do we not remember all that has happened to us there?"

"It seems to me," said the Brahmin, "that we remember a good deal, but we can only remember events here and there, though our acquired aptitudes and customs cling to us, so that in a new state they are easily re-acquired. Why is it that one man does a thing easily,

and others do so with difficulty ? Do you not see that animals know how to find and take care of themselves almost from birth ; and how could they do so unless some memory remained of what they had learned in previous existences ? When you are in any difficulty do you never foresee what is going to be the end of it ? ”

“ Sometimes, when I am in danger, I feel that all this has happened to me before in some other life, and that I have borne through with it. When no escape appears I know that it will come, and when it does appear it is clear.”

“ I knew when they brought you here you were come to help me.”

“ You mean that you were to help me.”

“ No ; what I can do for you is nothing. God has made you like a king, I should like to be your vizier.”

“ Good,” replied Stephen, “ your petition is granted.”

The Brahmin then stepped up to the sculptured figure at the end of the cave. “ They say,” he exclaimed, that this was the image of a wise man, the son of a king, who taught that all men were equal, that they should love one another, and eat and drink together. It often seems to me that this is true, and that all men are of the same blood, though some from pride have given out that they are of different blood from the poor and lowly. Is this not so ? ” cried the Brahmin, fixing his eyes upon the image of Buddha. “ Then should I not go out to the world as a teacher ? ” he continued, addressing the image. “ Well, I shall do so gladly, for my unquiet thoughts give me no peace. Did you not see,” he said,

turning to Ashbourne, "how light flashed from the image of Buddha, and how he nodded his head to me?"

Ashbourne had before this suspected that the Brahmin was not quite right in his mind, and having an instinctive dread of the insane, he judged it prudent to reply that he did not happen to be looking that way, on which Ananda took up his lamp and went away, talking as if holding conversation with some imaginary person.

Ashbourne, who, like most people of his age, was not very firm in his rationalistic views, felt an overpowering awe at being left behind in the pitchy darkness of the cave, with an image accused of having nodded to a Brahmin; but the light of morning came, and then passed into night, and one day succeeded another in dreary succession. During this time his wounds slowly healed, and had it not been for some fits of ague which kept his strength down, he might have made an effort to get out of his uneasy situation. The Brahmin got him some roots, which being rubbed down and swallowed, stopped the fever.

One night he had fallen asleep in the cave, when he was awaked by a low voice. It was Ananda. "Awake, arise, it is no longer safe for you to be here. I have word that men are coming to kill you."

"I do not understand," said Ashbourne, who was now fully awake, though somewhat perplexed, "why they should now seek to kill me. They might have done it before. Why did they try to save me?"

"The time is short," replied the Brahmin. "It is the

Rajputin lady who has sent word to warn you. There is also a horse here ready for you, and a man to guide you. Go with him. You will meet with your friends before you go far."

"But I fear I am too weak to ride."

"Do what you can," said the Brahmin. "Be as far as may be from this place when the Bundela people come, for they will search all the caves to find you."

Ananda led him out of the cave. At the doorway he found a horse waiting.

"Take this," said the Brahmin, placing a bag into Ashbourne's hand, which he mechanically put in his pocket.

They helped him on the horse, a lean old beast, which stumbled down the slope. It was dark, and Ashbourne was so weak that he could scarcely keep the saddle. Luckily the horse was not restive, and quietly followed the Hindu, a tall figure, who walked forward as if he knew the way.

"Where are you taking me?" said Ashbourne.

"Where they told me to go with you," replied the man; "but I fear we shall get our throats cut."

As his guide would give no further information, Ashbourne could do nothing more but keep his seat upon the horse, wondering what was next to happen. He soon felt it a grievous exertion to sustain himself in the saddle. A sensation of giddiness seized upon him; he longed to throw himself off the horse, which went wearily trudging on in the darkness. He longed for light, although he feared the glare of the Indian sun. It was with a feeling of relief that he saw an expanse

of light slowly gaining one corner of the sky. It was morning at last. His guide urged him on, listening nervously for the sound of pursuers. At last his weakness became so great that he dismounted from the horse, and lay down half-swooning on the ground. He felt totally unable again to mount. If they overtook him he could do no more. After a time they heard the sound of horses' hoofs from the opposite direction. A troop of horsemen soon appeared. It turned out that they were friends, being the first of a force sent by the emperor to avenge the death of Abul Fazl. It was led by Raj Singh, who had been at the siege of Asir, and knew Ashbourne personally.

There was a rapid comparison of news. When the tidings of the death of Abul Fazl reached Agra, Akber's grief was greater than what he had shown on the death of his own son. A force was sent under Patr Das and Raj Singh to pursue the Bundela chief, Bir Singh. Raj Singh told Ashbourne that rumour had put him down amongst the dead. Stephen's own story, short and mysterious, excited the wonder of Raj Singh, who advised him to proceed to Agra with as little delay as possible; but he was so utterly exhausted that they had to pitch a tent for him, and allow him to rest until night. He soon fell into a deep sleep, and when he awoke he found the troops had marched on, taking with them his Hindu guide. They had left him two attendants and a litter, and some kahars, who bore him that night to Orcha. Here he improved rapidly, and after a few days' rest, he set out in a palki for Agra.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RETURN TO HIS QUARTERS—AN AGONISING QUESTION.

WHEN at last he came so near his own dwelling as to recognise each familiar object on the road, the tumult of his thoughts made his heart beat. Partly from dislike to exertion, owing to languor and weakness, or from motives which he did not care to avow even to himself, Ashbourne had sent no message to his wife, intending to bear the tidings of his own safety. It was dark before the bearers reached the house. He answered the challenge of the native sentry, who recognised his voice. They bore him under the mango trees, and set him down at his own door. He entered unannounced, passing some of his servants, who salaamed to him in a flutter of surprise as they recognised him. The apartments were all lighted up. His wife was seated, playing on a lute, with Constantine and several other young men, and half-a-dozen of women, beautifully dressed, dancing about the room. Wine and trays of sweetmeats stood by. They seemed in the full tide of enjoyment, when Ashbourne,

pale and stern, with his form emaciated by sickness, and his dress worn and dusty, stepped abruptly into the room. Irene uttered a scream, Constantine gave a start and a faint cry. Those who were seated sprang to their feet. All drew back, leaving Ashbourne standing in the middle of the group, gazing at his wife. Obviously he was not welcome.

“Is it you? Are you alive?” she at last said.

“In truth, if I am dead, you seem to be making merry on the occasion. Who are these people?”

“Constantine brought some friends to cheer me.”

He felt that there was something wrong, and turned angrily back to the outer room. The guests left abruptly, some little delay being caused by one who, having taken a good deal of wine, did not feel disposed to relinquish the entertainment.

Irene followed Ashbourne, looked at him again and again with a glance half timid, half searching, and then flung herself into his arms. Wrath, suspicion, disappointment were swelling in his heart. He felt as if his breast would burst; but the touch of her soft arms and accustomed caress seemed to melt unpleasant feelings away.

“Ah, how unkind you are. One would think that there was death in your heart. Is it that your spirit has gone, and your body alone has come back? I have wept so much, and now you will not let me rejoice. Why did you send me no word of your safety? It was only two days ago that I heard that you had escaped.”

“Assuredly you did not expect me to-night,” he replied.

“Well, why did you not send me word that you were coming? But you are here, and all is well. How wretched I have been.”

Her melting words, her soft voice, her caresses had their effect upon Stephen. He had felt that something was wrong; now he hoped that all might be right, that she was only thoughtless. His will to think and act was melting away under a soft current of feeling. Why not seize upon the happiness of the hour, and away with suspicion and wrath?”

He contented himself with saying: “Wait till I have washed away the marks of my journey, and put on fresh clothes.”

“Well, do not be long,” said she, “for I am wearying to hear of your adventures. Now say that you have no more anger in your heart, and I shall let you go.”

He suffered her to embrace him for a moment, and then turned away. His intelligence and his heart were at war. He wished to let the whirl of his thoughts and feelings subside. He must have some minutes to reflect calmly. He opened the door to go out into the night, when he noticed a small white figure retreating into the darkness.

“Who is that?” he cried.

“It is Hasmat,” answered a childish voice, running back and clasping him. “I am very joyful you are back again. They said that you were dead, and they put me out of the house.”

"Why did they do that?" asked Ashbourne.

"Not without reason," answered the child.

"What reasons had they?" asked he.

"Very good reasons," replied Hasmat.

"Tell me what you mean," cried Ashbourne hastily.

"I am not permitted to say what is known to me," answered Hasmat. "The lady beat me for looking through the screens."

"Tell me, without delay, what you mean?" said Ashbourne, seizing the child by the arm.

"Then,"—after a pause—"you will not allow the lady to beat me or put me away."

"Oh, no," said Ashbourne.

"She said that if ever I carried tales to you she would send me to the Portuguese priests, who, having butchered me, would cook my flesh at their feast."

"You need not be afraid," said Ashbourne, assuringly, "I will not permit anybody to harm you if you tell the truth."

"But the lady beat me for listening," repeated Hasmat.

"Well, tell me what you meant, and I shall take care no one will punish you for it."

The child looked him gravely in the face, and then said, "the lady is very bad."

"What has she done?" said Ashbourne.

"Come to another place, some one will hear," said the child, looking round. He took her to a room within, and she looked through all the doors. At last, coming close to him, she whispered, "That man

who comes continually to her, is not her brother at all."

The child looked frightened at the expression of pain which appeared on his blanched face. Her words reigned over his mind for a few intolerably bitter moments, and then he reflected. How could this be true? Constantine had been introduced to him under the patronage of Akber, and it was well known that he had been educated in the palace. There was no mistake of his identity or that of his younger brother either. He could not for a moment suspect either the emperor or Hakim Ali of having played any deceit upon him.

"What story is this? You are deceiving me," he said to the child. "I know that he is her brother."

"He is little of her brother," said Hasmat quietly. "He would not come so often if he were her brother."

This was pure childishness, but when he reflected that he had never seen the lady till she was brought to his house, there now flashed upon him a thousand surmises; a hundred things he had wondered at, all suddenly seemed to rush together, and to clothe themselves into the form of this deceit.

"I know that this man Constantine had a sister," said he. "Where has she gone?"

"I think this woman was changed for her," said Hasmat composedly.

"How do you know all this?" he asked.

"I watched and listened," said Hasmat. "Besides, it is known to a great many people."

Full of fury, Ashbourne ran into his zenana to reproach the lady with the shameful imposture which he now believed had been played upon him. At first, she seemed stupefied with terror. Her dusky face turned a warm yellow. The lines of her countenance altered, the cheeks were rigid, the corners of the mouth fell, the eyes seemed to enlarge, the white becoming more prominent, her arms dropped powerless to her side. In a short time, recovering her coolness, she began to reply to the accusations he heaped upon her.

“Some one deceived you,” said she. “It is all an invention. How could you believe anything so absurd? Do you think the emperor would play you such a trick? Are you not ashamed believing anything so stupid? You only wish to get rid of me. No doubt you have ceased to love me, and met with some other woman whom you prefer. What wrong did I ever do to you?”

Then she burst into a paroxysm of weeping, after which she began again to speak.

“Who told you all this? I suppose some one that must be believed?”

As he did not wish to betray little Hasmat, he remained silent, when she went on—

“Why do you persist annoying and harassing me in this way? You are making shame to yourself as to me.”

Here her two women, who had been watching and listening through the screen, now slipped in to support their mistress.

“Who has put this shame upon me?” she cried. “Some one has told his honour that Constantine is not my brother.”

“A word of great shame,” cried the two women, echoing one another. “Who can have been such a liar? There are many liars in Agra. But why should any one be so soft as to believe them, making his own life bitter and throwing shame upon his wife and himself?”

“What else?” said one of the women.

“No doubt,” quoth the other, “shame upon the wife will also fall upon the husband.”

“All this is very good,” said Ashbourne, “but I shall go and make inquiries if this be true.”

“What kind of inquiry?” asked one of the women.

“Do not fear,” answered he; “I shall make a thorough inquiry.”

“Well, then,” said the lady, in a gentle, composed voice, “go and inquire. But do not inquire from bad, mischievous people. Inquire from those who know, and will tell you the truth.”

Ashbourne was staggered at her calmness, and thought that, after all, there might be some mistake.

In the morning, an officer of the Court came, with some horsemen, bearing a summons from the emperor for Stephen to repair to the palace, as Akber wished to hear what he knew of the murder of Abul Fazl. The messenger allowed him little time to prepare, and it seemed to Ashbourne that his movements were watched. On arriving at the palace he had to wait

several hours till summoned into the emperor's presence. Akber received him in a chamber, with several of his officers, listened attentively to what he had to tell, and asked him many questions. Evidently he took the death of Abul Fazl with deep regret, and was surprised and suspicious that the Hindus should have spared Ashbourne. The circumstances under which he met in with Raj Singh's party on the road to Orcha were strange.

"Did he know that Raj Singh's people were coming that way?"

"No, he did not."

"Then what induced him to set out in that way during the night?"

"The Brahmin told him that the Bundela people were coming to kill him."

"Then why had they spared him in the battle, and received him when wounded?"

He told the emperor that he believed that his life had been spared owing to his having saved the Rajputin lady at the sack of Ahmadnagar. This was the first time that Akber had heard the story, and no one else confessed to having heard of it. Some thought the story very improbable.

"Why did they spare your life, and then wish to kill you?" asked the Sadr Jahan.

Ashbourne could not tell.

"When you were living with the gosain, did they ask you if you would join the kings of the south in a war against the Moguls?"

Ashbourne said that they had done so ; but that he had refused, saying that he would serve no one in India save the emperor.

“Do you know anything of this ring?” said Akber, telling his purse-bearer to put a ring in Ashbourne’s hand.

He looked at it attentively with the calmness of a connoisseur. It was a beautiful ring, with a large diamond, rubies, and other stones, evidently of great value.

“I never saw such a ring before,” he said, with composure.

“That ring,” said Akber, “was in a purse which you had when you met Raj Singh’s party.”

Ashbourne’s face flushed with indignation. They had searched his purse, no doubt, when he was asleep after he was exhausted, and had sent this ring on to the emperor to strengthen some accusation against him.

He said that when he left that night the Brahmin had given him the purse or bag, which he had taken without well-nigh knowing what it was. He had not opened it at the time, and if the ring had been in the purse, it must have been taken out before he examined the contents.

“Had he the purse with him?”

“No, he had not, but he thought that he had brought it with him to the house, and might be able to find it. There were some gold pieces in it, some of which he had spent.”

"A gosain gave you gold, and for nothing," said the Sadr incredulously.

"Do you know this, then?" said Akber. A large round ingot of gold was handed to him.

"Do you see the inscription?"

Ashbourne read in Persian characters the words, "Death to Akber." All shouted at the ominous word, but the emperor went on—

"Did you ever see this before?"

"Yes, certainly," said Ashbourne; "it was one of the bullets Chand Sultana fired at our battery."

"Of what metal is it?"

"It is of gold," said Ashbourne, "and I think that I gave this one to Benedict de Goes, the missionary, to pay a gaming debt."

"Then did you consider it justly your own?"

"Well, I did," said Ashbourne bluntly. "It was directed to me, and in all the world the arms of the enemy belong to the soldier who takes them."

Akber had heard of the gold and silver bullets, and though perhaps he thought that the imperial treasury might have been enriched by some of them, he did not wish this matter to be pushed too far. Some of the courtiers then reminded the emperor that the Feringhi had said that the government was bad, the cultivators cruelly taxed to pay for the extravagance of the Court, that if India had a frugal sovereign like the Princess of England, the country would be very prosperous, for the land was rich and the people easy to govern.

“I said that the sadrs took bribes,” cried Ashbourne, boiling over with indignation.

Instead of this inciting Akber against the Englishman, he observed that travellers’ opinions were free, and that these words must have been said in private conversation, and not for purposes of sedition. “Indeed,” he added with a smile, “he has said as much to me.”

Though towards the close of the interview Akber seemed to recover his usual benignity, Ashbourne felt that he had fallen into the shade of suspicion, and saw that he had enemies who were plotting his destruction. His own private misadventure and disgrace so occupied his mind, that he several times thought of telling the emperor about it; but he judged the time and circumstances inopportune, and wished to make further inquiry. Besides, he knew that the Hindustanis had an extreme delicacy in talking about affairs implicating their wives, and felt sore at making known his own disgrace to an audience, some of whom were clearly unfriendly. When out of the palace he began to feel that he had made an escape. It was clear that he had some powerful enemies amongst the courtiers, and that the Jesuit missionaries had been trying to ruin him in the emperor’s favour. He was in a difficult position, from which some skill would be required to extricate himself; but this new trouble did not distress him like the old one—indeed, he felt it as a kind of relief. Being weak and exhausted, he returned to Ahorapur. He approached his house with an overwhelming feeling that some dreadful crisis was at hand. The little girl Hasmat

met him at the door. "The lady is gone," she said.

"Gone—where?"

"I do not know," replied the child; "she struck and abused me, and said that I was the cause of the whole mischief, and then she and her servants gathered together their things, and a horse car came, in which they left."

Ashbourne ran into the empty apartments. Everything was in disorder, articles of clothing and finery were scattered on the floor, left behind as of less value.

Hasmat had already decorated herself with some ornaments which she picked up.

"Did you tell any one she was going?" asked Stephen.

"Not I," replied Hasmat. "Why should I prevent her going? You do not know, sahib, what a bad woman she was." Here the child caught the expression of pain in Stephen's face, and she clung to him and wept.

The exhaustion of his wounds and illness, the shock of disappointment, the strain he had that day undergone in defending himself against unworthy accusations, joined to this last conclusive proof of guilty fears, were too much for the man. He felt as if he would sink on the floor; the light of heaven seemed to become dim. He staggered to a couch and sat down. The child followed him, put her arms round his neck, and kissed him. The tears flowed fast down his cheeks. Other and more stormy emotions soon came. In a little time he

rose and asked the servants what they knew of the lady's departure. They only confirmed what Hasmat had already told him. She was gone, no one knew where.

Nicholas Hart, who had been away somewhere the preceding night, had now returned. From him he could not obtain much information; in fact Nicholas was one of those Englishmen who live in a foreign country without knowing the language, disliking the inferior position in which one is placed, who speaks a tongue which he does not know. He had managed to learn a few phrases about his ordinary duties, and his Hindi declensions did not go much further than the imperative mood. He did not trouble himself to associate even with the Europeans at Agra. He could only say that the lady had led a very merry life since Ashbourne had left, and that the Armenian Constantine came very much about her. Some people said he was only her brother by Adam. In fact, brothers do not trouble their sisters much after they are married.

CHAPTER XVIII.

INQUIRIES AT AGRA.

STEPHEN sent to inquire what Constantine was doing. They found that he had abruptly left that day, without saying where. Zadoc had been long away from Agra. The next day Ashbourne sought some of his friends, in order to gain more information. To some he could get no admission. At last he found a young Ameer, who had often professed great friendship for him, and who received him in a sympathetic manner. It is generally to these sympathetic people that one confides secrets, and they always keep them ill. The young man listened to Ashbourne's story with interest, and expressed much astonishment; but when Ashbourne asked him what he thought of it, he merely said, "I cannot understand."

"But what do you think I ought to do?"

"There is no need of your doing anything. She has left you. Do you want her back?"

"No, but I wish revenge. It is the disgrace that strikes me."

“That may be, but why then do you talk about it? I never heard of it till you told me.” As for the suspicions about having anything to do with the Hindus who had killed Abul Fazl, he said it was a plot which was sure to break down. He might safely trust the emperor’s penetration in that matter, only they might try to say something else against him. Ashbourne was now somewhat suspicious of his friend, and after a little further conversation he left. The next person he could get access to was Hakim Ali, who received him kindly, and listened quietly to the story of his troubles. As for the suspicions against him, he said, “Do not let them disturb you. Sometimes the truth looks strange, and, indeed, had you not lived through them, perhaps you might have thought so yourself. The emperor has been much disturbed by the death of Abul Fazl, whom he much loved. We all remembered how he lamented the death of his elder brother Faizi. He died in the month Safar 1004 (1595). He had been ill six months. If they had consulted me at first, instead of that ignorant pretender, Hasan of Paniput, it might have been otherwise. When his last moments came near, his majesty brought me with him to see the sheikh at midnight, but Faizi was unable to speak. The emperor gently raised his head and said, “Sheikh-ji, I have brought Ali, the physician, with me, will you not speak to me?” Faizi gave no answer, and the emperor, in his grief, threw his turban on the ground and wept aloud, then, after trying to console Abul Fazl, he went away. The gems of thought in Faizi’s poems will never be

forgotten. When the news came of the death of Abul Fazl," continued the Hakim, "they hesitated how to break the tidings to the emperor, as they knew his grief would be great. It was the custom to announce the death of a prince to an emperor of the house of Timur by his wakil presenting himself before the throne with a blue handkerchief tied round his wrist. In this way Abul Fazl's wakil appeared before Akber to give him the first warning of the death of his faithful councillor. I really feared for the health of the emperor; for days he took no food."

Ashbourne managed to lead back the Hakim to the subject which deeply interested him. "About the lady, why disturb yourself?" said Ali; "there are plenty more women in the world. Seek out some girl from a poor and respectable family, who will be glad to live with you. These women brought up in the seraglio are artful and extravagant. You are well free from her. Do not trouble yourself any more."

"I should like to know where she has gone, and to understand the meaning of the trick played upon me. Who has ventured to do this?"

"Ah! it is not good to know everything. This is my advice. Seek not to know any more."

"But I wished to be revenged on those who have deceived me so shamefully."

"That is natural," replied the Hakim, "but one can seldom get revenge. There is no one who will help you to get it. This is my advice. Let the thing pass; say no more about it."

“No, I will have justice ! I shall complain to the emperor.”

“Do not do so,” said the Hakim earnestly ; “you will get into more trouble.”

“This I do not understand,” replied Ashbourne. “It was the emperor who first put me upon this unhappy affair. It was you who took the message from him, and I have a right to your help. I believe you know more about this business than you will tell. It comes into my mind that you once told me that people were happy in a delusion, and it was better not to undeceive them. I have several times thought over your words, now their meaning is clear to me. You have led me into this affair, and should lead me out of it.”

“If you will know,” replied Ali, “I hope I can trust you. Only this, you must promise that you will let no one know who gave you information. Having heard it, forget my name even in thinking of it.”

“There is then some danger about this business ?” said Ashbourne.

“Assuredly,” replied the old physician, “one must be careful. The red tongue sometimes gives the green head to the winds.” The Hakim then looked at all the doors to see that no one was listening, and taking Ashbourne into the farther corner of the room, he said, in a low voice, “It must be known to you that every one loves the Emperor Akber, whose name be exalted, but every one fears Selim, who is cruel and oppressive. He once made a man be flayed alive. Akber broke out in anger when he heard of it, saying he wondered how the

son of a man who could not see a dead beast flayed without pain could be guilty of such cruelty to a human being. Once Selim showed a fine tank in the palace garden, with marble steps going down into the water, and then he asked the courtiers around, ‘What is the best thing to fill this tank?’ Some said rose water, others sherbet, others wine, some honey. ‘No,’ he said, ‘it is best to fill it up with rebels’ blood, and, when the rule comes to me, it will be bad for those who offend me.’”

“But in what way does this affect me?” said Ashbourne.

“I shall tell you. The Prince Selim heard of the proposed marriage between you and the Armenian girl, and that she was so beautiful. One day he went to see his mother, Suleima Sultana, when she had with her your betrothed. Although she was shy, and would scarcely speak, he was much charmed with her. The begum wished to send her away; but he would not suffer it. His mother was afraid, and taking Selim aside, implored him to let the girl alone. He promised to do so, and went away; but next day he sent for the Armenian Constantine, and with ferocious threats, told him he must give him his sister, as his heart desired her. As for Constantine, he is a caitiff; through fear, he promised to do the prince’s bidding, who then promised him a large sum of money, for he was infatuated with love for the heart-alluring damsel. They then agreed to wheedle her out of the seraglio; but fearing the emperor, they concerted how to deceive you. As Constantine knew that you had never seen

his sister, they between them worked out this trick. There lived in Agra a Brahmini woman called Ameena, who, like the Armenian, had a beautiful voice. She was very clever, and used to act in plays in the seraglio. I once saw her myself acting as Vesantasena in the "Toy Cart," which the emperor got translated from the Sanscrit. Every one was charmed with her. She could assume any part she liked, and change her voice at will. The emperor gave her some rare jewels. The begums often had her living with them in the seraglio, for she was very bright and amusing. So Selim suggested to Ameena that she should take the part of the Armenian, and offered her a reward. No doubt she was glad to get a husband in any way."

Here the Hakim was interrupted by an outburst of wrath on the part of Ashbourne, who uttered imprecations in his native language, with such a furious manner, that the learned physician began to tremble for his own safety. He hastened to assure Stephen that he had known nothing of the plot at the time, and had only got a clue to it a short time before Ashbourne had left for the south. Believing that Stephen lived happily with the woman, he had feared to do mischief.

Ashbourne's mind was so on the stretch, that every word became a burning thought. He had no doubt of the truth of this strange revelation. It fitted into everything, explained everything, answered to all his guesses, fulfilled all his suspicions.

"What a fool I have been. How monstrously this woman has cheated me!"

“Well, you are not the first who has been deceived by a woman,” observed the Hakim. “It is their business.”

What had become of the Armenian was unknown to him.

“Was this known to many?” asked Ashbourne.

“A few people in Agra knew of it. It was not known to Akber. People dared not speak of it for fear of the prince. All men fear him. Some day the lives of all will be in his hands. See what has happened to Abul Fazl. No doubt,” went on the Hakim, “it was Selim who got Bir Singh, by the promise of a great reward, to attack Abul Fazl. The sheikh’s head was sent to the prince at Allahabad.”

“Is this known to the emperor?”

“Yes, he has been told.”

“What has he done?”

“Nothing against Selim. He does not wish to believe it. Danyal is now dead—died of drunkenness—and so Selim is his only son left, save the child at Kossipur. There are never more than three or four princes in the house of Timur. That is arranged in the seraglio. Akber dreads a disputed succession. He remembers with horror the wars between his father, the Emperor Humayun, and the Prince Camran. If you make complaints against Selim he will not listen willingly. Do not offend the prince any further. He has many friends, and you many enemies, who are trying to ruin you.”

An idea struck Ashbourne.

“Do you think the message to the gosain, that they were coming to kill me, was a real one?”

“Why not?” said the Hakim.

“Then what was the reason of it?”

“Probably a message from Selim, who heard that you were still alive. He thought that you would perish along with the rest, but when he heard they were keeping you alive, he would send word that he was not pleased. This is my hope, that Patr Das and Raj Singh will take Bir Singh alive, when all the truth will perhaps be known.”

Ashbourne told the Hakim about the presumed attempt upon his life when setting out from Agra, at which Ali nodded significantly.

“Now I must go. A patient wishes to see me. Return to your own house, and do not say you have been here. But let me see that wound, which is not yet healed.”

Though Ashbourne protested that his wound needed no further care, the Hakim undid his dress, and calling for linen and ointment, ostentatiously dressed the scar. Ashbourne gathered from this that his medical friend wished it to be understood in his household that his visitor had come to consult him about his health. He had the presence of mind to humour this device so far as to present the Hakim with a piece of gold for his surgical services, which was received with demonstrations of gratitude.

Ashbourne mounted his horse, and rode away to several of his European friends in Agra, especially

M. Regnier, Leedes the jeweller, and an Italian worker in marble. They spoke with less reserve, but seemed to know less. Every one had heard some rumours of the affair; some thought of telling him their suspicions. Every one seemed to know more of the thing than himself. Constantine had disappeared; his house was empty, his servants all gone. The younger brother could not be found. Then where was their sister, and what had become of her, the bride promised to him, who had been thus mysteriously spirited away, and of whom he had only obtained a counterfeit? His friends said that they would make inquiries if he would wait. It was difficult; every one was afraid of Selim, whose energy and revengeful nature were well known. If the girl had gone into his seraglio, as there was every ground to suppose, there was little hope of her ever coming out. No one encouraged him in his resolution to complain to the emperor.

“No doubt Akber loves justice,” they said; “but he also loves his children. We remember about the general, Khan Khanan, who was recalled from the Deckan in disgrace, because he complained of the conduct of the Prince Murad; but, indeed, Murad was much in the wrong. Selim will find many ways of darkening the truth, and you will find it difficult to make the matter clear to the emperor.”

But Ashbourne had made up his mind. The disgrace put upon him, the double deceit of Constantine, the attempts to get him murdered, the false accusations trumped up against him, bore every consideration

of expediency before them. He would go to the emperor were he to be trampled under the feet of the elephants. Moreover, there was growing strong in his mind a desire to learn what had become of the Armenian damsel thus betrayed by her relations. She had been betrothed to him, and if they had not been married, it was not owing to any failure of intention on either side. Surely she must be very winsome, when the prince was willing to risk so much in order to obtain her.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NEW INQUIRY—WHAT THE EMPEROR THOUGHT.

ASHBOURNE soon felt that his enemies were busy, for next morning there appeared two munshis, who, with an affectation of urbanity, combined with an ill-subdued air of importance, entered Ashbourne's house, declaring that they were sent by the accountant of the army to inquire about the complaints of a purveyor of stores whom Ashbourne had sent about his business, having detected him in false weights and other frauds. This man, counting on the support of some of the native officers of artillery secretly implicated in the same dishonest practices, had accused Ashbourne of unjustly depriving him of money due to him, and of making gain on the sale of cast horses, and of oppressive conduct in other matters.

Ashbourne felt a strong impulse to fall upon these worthies, and if the pair had been able to overcome the fear of immediate damage to their persons, they might at the expense of a few hard blows have easily tempted him into an assault, which would have been very advantageous to their desire of ruining the hated

Feringhi. Fortunately Ashbourne's native secretary had an old feud with one of these deputies, hence he treated them with great courtesy, and artfully represented to Ashbourne the right of the accountant of the army to make such inquiries, and managed to make the interview go by without Stephen treating the men with absolute defiance. But whenever their backs were turned the munshi changed his tone.

"Honourable sir," he said, "these men are sent to ruin you. The accountant would never have done this without the support of the vizier, and he must have counted on the sufferance of the emperor."

"Who are these men?" asked Stephen.

"The little black lame one," replied the munshi, "is called Sharaf Beg. He is learned in the law, and pretends to be very religious and austere. He is always boasting how little he eats. He is fond of carping and disputing, which makes some people think him very clever. When he undertakes a case against a man he has no more scruples nor pity than a wolf, and less sincerity than a fox, and it is not his fault if a man be not hunted to death. The other, the flabby-looking one, is a Hindu money-lender named Gol Dass. In spite of his soft manner he is as malicious as the lawyer. He is a great coward. His house is near to mine; his wife bullies him, and getting drunk makes a great noise, accusing him of all kinds of infidelities. Nevertheless he is fond of making inquiries about the conduct of other people."

"But this accusation is too absurd," said Ashbourne.

“That may be; only, these are false and deceitful men. They will go fishing about seeking for discontented persons, making all kinds of inquiries, and turning everything the wrong way, suppressing whatever might help you, till they have made up some plausible fiction; rather than fail they will forge documents and suborn witnesses. Their report will be sent to the accountant-general, who will pass it to the vizier, who will take a favourable occasion to show it to the emperor.”

“Well, may I not trust to his penetration and justice?”

“No doubt you might, if he were willing to make the full light of his understanding shine upon the matter, but he has not time to do everything. I remember the case of Shah Mansur accused of treason by Rajah Todar Mall, and at once hanged on a tree. A little while after it was found out that the letters produced against him were forgeries. I do not think anything was done against Todar Mall, who held the whole revenue system of the emperor in his hands, and it was difficult to do without him.”

This was sufficiently alarming, and Ashbourne would have gladly left a position in which he was thus subjected to a false accusation. But a little consideration showed him that leaving his position, even if it were possible, would only strengthen the accusations against him. Sharaf Beg and Gol Dass went amongst the native artillerymen and hangers-on at Ahorapur asking insidious questions, and throwing out insinuations with

a view to stir up discontent and disorder. In this they might have been more successful than they were had not there marched into Ahorapur the day after, the rest of the old crew of the *Unicorn*, the company which Ashbourne had left behind with the army of the Deckan, and which, it will be remembered, had been allowed by Abul Fazl to go to recruit themselves at Agra. Stephen felt cheered by the friendly counsels of Henry Ames, and the increase of strength from his own countrymen helped to repress the spirit of disorder which Sharaf Beg and Gol Dass were trying to arouse, with the intention of taking note of it in that report as a proof of the incapacity of the hated Feringhi. Subtle adepts in mischief as the two munshis were, they knew the probability of an affray between the white and black artillerymen at Ahorapur. Great was the indignation of the Englishmen when they found that their leader had been treated with unworthy suspicion; on the other hand the Hindustanis were jealous of the superior rank and rewards given to the strangers.

The situation was getting intolerable. In the maddening disquiet of his thoughts Stephen longed for the hour to come when he might see the emperor. Akber's desire was that he should be accessible to all. Admittance to the ruler of the land, he used to say, is like irrigation to a flower-bed. Naturally this was a privilege which his ministers were willing to restrict, and on one pretext or another the mace-bearers were directed to keep obnoxious people back when his majesty showed himself. Ashbourne, through a

functionary of the Court, sent a request for a private audience, and waited till the second watch for a reply. But rightly suspecting the message had not been delivered, dressing himself in his finest, he boldly presented himself at the state hall amongst the officers of the army and Court. He could judge that he was under a shade by the cold looks of the courtiers. Some old friends shunned him; others assumed an air of unusual ceremony. In a little time the sound of the great drum announced that his majesty was approaching. In a few minutes Akber appeared at a window overlooking the hall.

Weakened with illness and conflicting emotions, and agitated by the strange character of his situation, Ashbourne almost swooned away, but collecting himself with a great effort, he pushed forward, made the customary salutation, and raised his voice, saying that he had something to communicate to the emperor. Several of the courtiers turned angrily upon him, crying that his majesty was going to address the assembly, and Ashbourne was pushed back, and would have been hustled out of the hall, but the quick eye of the monarch had noticed everything.

“Let Ashbourne remain. We shall yet hear what he has to say.” He then began his address, to which Stephen paid no close attention. After the address and the exclamations of applause which of course followed, the different ministers and secretaries presented one piece of business after another, and it seemed to Ashbourne as if they wished to occupy the

monarch's time, and lead away his mind. Akber, however, did not forget our friend. A messenger was sent to ask him to come forward, when his majesty said quickly:

"Your case will be considered in due time. We have not forgotten your good services. We are not prejudiced against you, so do not be impatient."

"It is not any accusation against myself, great prince," cried Ashbourne, "against which I come to ask your judgment, it is an outrage which I have suffered, which has intercepted the favour you intended for me, and which has inflicted on me a wrong no man can patiently endure."

"And what is this outrage?" asked Akber.

"It seems to me better that your majesty should hear me in private," replied Ashbourne.

"Tell it at once," cried the emperor, somewhat impatiently, "and in as few words as you can."

Ashbourne was not learned enough in the niceties of the language to use much circumlocution, and the bluntness of his tale soon made the assembly hold their breath, but the emperor promptly interrupted him.

"Of a truth," said the prince, "we had better hear this on another occasion. Wait in the hall till I shall send for you."

He then turned away from the window, and in a short time the assembly dissolved. Ashbourne sat down on one of the cushions in the vast hall. He had time enough to meditate on the strangeness of his

situation, for several hours passed away, no one coming near him. At last a mace-bearer approached Ashbourne, announcing that he was charged to conduct him to his majesty.

Most people consider their own affairs, especially their own wrongs, of some importance, and Ashbourne had been rehearsing in his mind what species of reception he would have. The emperor, perhaps, with two or three of his ministers and secretaries, would be in a private apartment, to hear this grave matter about Prince Selim. The mace-bearer led him through many passages into a garden, where he suddenly came in sight of Akber, standing under a tree, and holding in his hand his favourite gun, *Sangaram*, with which he shot Jei Mull at the siege of Chitore. He was evidently practising shooting at a mark. Beside him was the vizier and another great officer.

“Now, what is this you have to say? Tell me,” he said.

Leaning upon his matchlock, Akber listened attentively. Ashbourne saw him start twice or thrice, but otherwise he made no remark.

At the end he said, “Than this, no stranger story have I ever heard.”

“Too strange, indeed, to be easily credited,” observed the vizier, chiming in with what he guessed was the humour of his master.

“Now,” went on the emperor, “what proofs can you furnish of these statements?”

Ashbourne recollected that he had promised to

Hakim Ali not to mention his name, and was silent for a minute. He had no doubt of the truth of what he had related, but then this belief was dependent upon a number of minute particulars which he could not reproduce.

The vizier saw his confusion, and expressed his belief that there must be some mistake. Such an imposture no one would dare to attempt.

“Recollect,” said Akber, “that you have made a heavy accusation, bearing even upon the prince, my son, who I trust will be cleared of suspicion of such conduct; but if you believe this, some one must have told you.”

Ashbourne could only reply that the woman, whoever she was, had fled, that Constantine had disappeared. The only informant he could quote in his confusion, was the girl Hasmat, but when he mentioned her age the emperor smiled, and the vizier remarked that her evidence could not be taken.

The emperor then inquired how this girl had found her way into his house, and listened with apparent interest to Ashbourne’s account.

“I should like to see the child,” he said, “and will send for her, and make provision that she is well treated. In the meantime, you have behaved rashly in coming here without sufficient proof, but it may be that you could collect some. I remember Ameena, and if any one could have played such a part it was she. Now you may go. Collect what information you can. Do not lose time. I shall send for you again, which

will likely be the last time I can afford to such a matter."

Ashbourne went away much confused and perplexed. He saw that it would be very difficult to collect such evidence as would satisfy the emperor, especially as he might be unwilling to believe in the complicity of his own son. The emperor, it seemed, would not himself order an inquiry. Beyond his own testimony, Ashbourne could advance little, and unless Hakim Ali would help him, he feared that he might fail in collecting proofs to convince an indifferent or unwilling judge.

CHAPTER XX.

WITHIN THE SERAGLIO.

PEOPLE do not like imitations, much less counterfeits, even should they be equal to the original. Consider what is thought of jewels. They are things intended to look pretty or brilliant, and if this be effected, why ask of what they are made? but out of a bit of coloured glass or other arrangement, a Parisian workman will make something quite as beautiful as a ruby or an emerald, and so like that a jeweller can scarcely distinguish. One would think that this is enough, but women are ashamed to wear them, and are willing to spend money which would purchase many useful things, for genuine rubies and emeralds. In this way we imagine that the counterfeit Irene will not attract more interest, but that the reader is now anxious to hear something of the real one. Elias, Irene's father, had quitted Persia to seek his fortune in India, while she was still a child. From one employment after another he had risen to be *Qush Begi*, or superintendent of the imperial aviaries, that is, he had the care of the hawks, pigeons, and other

fowls kept at the emperor's palaces. This was an important and lucrative office, for Akber had been from his youth upwards a great bird-fancier. He took trouble in getting new breeds of pigeons, as well as choice falcons from Persia and Tartary. We are gravely told that the amusement which his majesty derives from the tumbling and flying of the pigeons, remind one of the ecstasy of enthusiastic dervishes. Many who knew the emperor's fancies tried to propagate new varieties, which had each its special name, such as the weeper, the fairy, the diamond, the royal aloe. Irene's mother, who was a native of Constantinople, and had seen a good deal of the world, often went to visit the great ladies of the seraglio, taking her little daughter with her. They sometimes lived for a month at a time with Rukayat Begum. As Akber's first wife, and the daughter of his uncle Hindal, this princess held the first rank in the mahal or seraglio, although she had no children. The mahal was a walled enclosure of several miles, within which the wives of Akber and other grand ladies had their residences, which were so many magnificent palaces in the midst of gardens, groves, and fountains. A cordon of Rajput soldiers kept watch on the outside, within these were the eunuchs, and in the interior there were guards of Tartar women, armed with bows, scimitars, and daggers, who had a military discipline under officers of their own sex. While the emperor resided in the seraglio, he was always guarded by these Amazons. Within the walls of the mahal there were as many as 5000 women,

for each of the begums and princesses had numerous attendants.

Irene's father took ill and died, and then her mother contracted a fatal disease. The emperor promised to give his protection to her sons, and Rukayat Begum to take charge of the girl, engaging to allow her to be educated in the Christian faith. At the same time, the begum was a somewhat austere lady, who read the Koran and the Mahomedan histories. No longer young, she tried to keep the affection of the emperor by her good sense and serious information. Irene was taught to read and write, and got what education was going in the seraglio. Irene had great natural talents for music, possessing a good ear and a rich, fine voice. She had great taste in embroidery, and could make anything in that line which she saw, and even devised new patterns. Having separate establishments, the great ladies were able to behave towards one another with dignified stiffness. Indeed, Akber's wives would scarcely admit that they knew one another, though, at the same time, they took care to be very well informed of one another's doings. All the gossip of Agra found its way into the mahal. As they could not entirely be content with the society of their dependents, they fell into sets. There was the Mussulman faction, headed by Rukayat Begum, the Hindu faction, consisting of the Rajput princesses, whom Akber had married through policy, and the free-thinkers, who professed to adopt the Divine faith, headed by Suleima Begum. Rukayat Begum disliked the Prince Selim, though she

cherished his son, Khurram,* whom she wished the emperor to make his successor. This austere princess was far from indulging in the larger hope concerning the fate of the Hindu wives, including the mother of Selim. She occasionally tried to induce Irene to accept the true faith, and marry a Mussulman grandee. Though the begum was generally kind to her, Irene sometimes found a difficulty in devising excuses to save herself from the well-meant schemes of her protectress.

In the midst of jangling creeds and religious mysticism or scepticism, Irene held fast to what she had learned from her mother of the Christian faith. Even within the walls of the seraglio, there was a little coterie of Christian women, who tried to sustain one another. It did not occur to the Armenian maiden that she should never have a husband, but whoever he might be, he ought to be one of her own religion, and he should give his love all to herself. To be one of the wives in the seraglio, even of a Mahomedan prince, was a position which she did not envy. Nevertheless, it was difficult to state this objection, without giving offence to the begum, who, though she herself might not have been unwilling to get rid of her rivals, did not think that her dependent should have aspirations beyond her own lot. As we have seen, Akber was far from restricting himself, even to the number of wives allowed in the Koran. Thus, Irene grew up with a feeling of loneliness around her. It was like living in a garden instead of a house, things around her were

* Afterwards the Emperor Shah Jehan.

strange and ever changing. It was unpleasing, too, that her lonely condition sometimes aroused comment and even pity of a kind that passed into scorn. Most of the young princesses and daughters of grandees, with whom she had acquaintance, were married very young, and went away when mere girls to the houses of their husbands, and so Irene felt her lot different from those of the same age as herself. Rukayat's splendid palace and gardens were quiet and dull, and the occasional attempts at games and amusements made it worse. Irene liked the Begum Suleima, who was bright and accomplished. She wrote poems under the name of *Makfi*, or the Concealed One, which found their way into the bookseller's shops at Agra. Rukayat Begum, on the other hand, had a contempt for versemakers, and the only proof that she ever read any of the poetry of the day, was her censure of its immoral tendencies, in which she was not wrong.

Irene, however, liked to go to see the literary begum, who found sympathetic tastes in the Armenian maiden. She soon learned to write verses and tales, and compose riddles and *tarikhs*.* MSS., written from right to left, in a very elegant fashion, passed between the two sometimes, disapproved of by Rukayat Begum. Irene gained Suleima's heart by singing her verses. She would gladly have taken her young friend to live with her, but this Irene did not quite favour, for, on the whole, she judged Rukayat to be a surer protectress.

* That is, short sentences, the letters of which, being summed up, gave the date of the birth or death of the person concerned.

“Child,” the austere begum would say to Irene, “go not often beside Suleima. In her breast there is little sense, nothing but a jingle of rhymes like the nonsense you read to me the other day. She keeps people whom a prudent woman, not to say a queen, would pick out and throw away as one would pick hairs out of bread. See that scapegrace, Amcena, whom she keeps by her for days, merely because she is amusing—a creature who might be with her husband amongst the dogs of hell for all the good she ever did since she was rescued from the funeral pyre by Daulat Khan, whom she bewitched. I warn you to keep away. Suleima is not careful enough for the young ladies who sit round her. She was so indiscreet as to let Selim see Mihrunisa, and he took such a fancy to her that the emperor had to get her married forthwith.”

“The emperor,” she added, with dignity, “wishes his sons to form alliances with the daughters of princes, and not with nobodies.”

As years passed on the outer world became stranger and stranger to Irene. She had left it when about twelve, and could remember what it was like. She was aware that her mother had not been without trials, and though she regretted that her mother’s excessive admiration of royal rank had made her miscalculate the importance of the begum’s patronage, she knew at the same time how unsafe the outer world was for an unprotected girl like herself, so she strove to be content. This mahal is but a bit of the earth enclosed, she said

to herself; within the bubble and without the bubble there is the same air.

One day at the lattice window of the palace, where they had gone to see the elephants fight, the Begum Suleima said to her, "Do you see that rider on the grey Arab, with two other white men? That is the commander of the Feringhi artillery that was at Ahmadnagar. Would you not like to be the Rudabeh of some such fairhaired Zal? only your hair is not long enough to help him up to your balcony."

"O begum, I have no mind to look at those strangers," answered Irene; "I came out to see the sports."

"See, he is coming nearer," said the lively begum; "he is a handsome young man. I have heard the emperor say much in his praise. Would you not like him for your lord?"

Irene gave no reply, and looked away, but after a time her glances fell again and again upon the young Englishman, who, all unconscious of being observed, was watching the struggles of the two elephants with lively interest.

Rukayat Begum, who was at a window not far off, heard of this. She made no remark at the time, but kept the idea in her mind. She soon found out that Ashbourne was unmarried, and when she next had a conversation with her imperial husband, she imparted to him the suggestion that the English Ameer would be a good husband for Irene. The emperor adopted the idea, and carried it out, as has been already told. The ladies of the mahal

were expected to do nothing but to amuse themselves, or be amused, hence they were not very happy. However much time might be spent in sleeping, lolling about, bathing, dressing, or being dressed, enjoying music, flowers, perfumes, there was time for unsatisfied energies, slighted vanity, discontent, and complaining. Beyond this stage few of these Eastern beauties passed. Those who had children were the happiest and the most important, but there were wonderfully few children in the seraglio. The rest took their lot with the indolent passiveness of their country. They were proud of their gilded chains, and if their seclusion was monotonous, it was at anyrate a condition of their rank. A girl living among them, holding to a different type, with different tastes, and unconformable opinions, excited dislike in some, and contempt or wonder in others. Some took an interest in the orphan girl, not so much out of kindly feeling, as from a motive more powerful with most people—the desire of finding some amusement for their vacuous minds. A beautiful girl, who would or could not get married, was quite a rarity in the mahal. They wondered that the emperor would not do something about it; or did the demure maiden lift her thoughts as high as her protector? She was beautiful enough to charm any one, but did not seem to know it. After all, who told her? It was a common question amongst these ladies—Do you think Irene beautiful? They were always able to point out defects or shortcomings, and as the question was nearly always decided in the negative, one could scarcely expect Irene

to be wiser than all the rest. As for the great emperor, though he rarely noticed the daughter of his old servant, he found room in his thoughts for everything.

Irene found her life strange and monotonous, and would gladly have taken an opportunity of getting into the outer world. She wished her brother, Constantine, to get married, when she might have gone to live with his wife, otherwise, she knew enough of his habits to think it indecorous for her to come under his roof.

After this Irene heard a good deal about Ashbourne, of his gallantry, generosity, love of justice, and other traits pleasing to a romantic maiden. She, herself unseen, saw him several times at different spectacles, and was so far impressed that his image gradually became a familiar tenant in her mind, so when the first overtures were announced to the young damsel, though surprised, she did not even pretend to be displeased. Perhaps we ought to make an apology for her. She had been brought out under unusual surroundings, and had none of the sentiment which the ladies of Europe had derived through custom and education. Though all women have not the same affectations, most women, whether of the East or the West, have a vein of romance in their nature. The epistolary correspondence between Ashbourne and herself fanned her rising partiality till it passed into a species of mystic fondness, which was only increased by the unexpected difficulties thrown in the way of the

marriage by the failure of the Nestorian bishop to reach Agra.

In the midst of disappointment and uncertainty came the request for an interview from Jerome Xavier, in order to ascertain whether he could conscientiously solemnise the marriage. This somewhat scandalised the worthy begum, who, of course, regarded such a proposal as highly improper. Nevertheless, the Father was so far master of the situation that he could venture to make himself troublesome, so the interview had to be granted. The Father was allowed within the outer gate, when a Cashmere shawl was thrown over his head, hanging down to his feet, and a eunuch led him to a kiosk, where he was allowed to remove the covering from his head, and converse with Irene, who was, however, closely veiled. Not being able to convince her at one interview of the superiority of the Catholic church over the Nestorian heresy, he was fain to ask another interview, which met with renewed opposition from the begum, who, however, allowed admission to a sister of a religious order to enter the seraglio to have further conversation with Irene. Maria, who was an educated Portuguese lady connected with the mission, used all her address to introduce new ideas into the mind of the Armenian maiden; and in this she succeeded much better than Jerome Xavier, for she had the tact to insist more upon the bonds of their common Christian faith than upon the different points of dispute between the Catholics and the Christians of St. Thomas. Though Irene did not feel bound to agree with all the

Jesuits advanced, she was much pleased with the conversation of the female missionary, who did her very best to ingratiate herself with the ladies of the seraglio, in order that their influence might be gained for the propagation of the Catholic faith.

CHAPTER XXI.

IRENE'S FURTHER ADVENTURES.

AMONGST these strange surroundings Irene's heart turned to her brother. She thought of him as she remembered him as a child, and had no idea of the degeneration which self-indulgence and bad companions had wrought upon him. That instead of being her protector he should betray her, never for a moment crossed her mind. The begum allowed her to go out of the seraglio several times to see her brother Constantine, to further the arrangements about the marriage. In the end he proposed that she should come to his house to get the marriage celebrated, and so she left the mahal. In a gilded howdah, borne on the back of a huge elephant, whose harness was inlaid with jewels and embroidery, Irene passed out of the seraglio, laden with gifts. The animal stepped along sedately, its pace measured by the tinkling of its silver bells; it entered the courtyard of Constantine's fine house, and, with a smile, Irene alighted. Two attendants were awaiting her. Constantine had advised her to take no servants with her

out of the seraglio. They were extravagant, domineering, and intriguing, and would retail everything she did to the gossiping eunuchs of the mahal. Thus Irene came alone. She bore a cheque upon the treasury for her *tabeen*, which she intrusted to her brother, to get cashed in due time. It was not without pain and compunction that Constantine carried through his scheme of treachery, nevertheless he carried it through, and with much cunning. Deeply in debt, and unable to sustain his course of dissipation any longer without some new supplies of money, his only hopes were in the profuse promises of Selim. Moreover, the threats of the prince had entered his base nature. If his sister became the favourite mistress or wife of the heir of the imperial throne, he saw clearly how his fortune would be made; but what would he gain through her marriage to a Feringhi adventurer? He had a good deal of trouble to persuade his younger brother Zadoc to suffer the deception to go on. He refused to play an active part in it; but as he had to leave Agra for a time, this excited no suspicion. Where full confidence is established, deceit is easy. Constantine had taken care that his sister's principal attendant should be one of his own creatures. This woman re-echoed all his statements, and brought to Irene prepared reports in a different form. His first device was to throw doubts upon the fidelity of Ashbourne, and to intercept all his messages. He then assured Irene that the Englishman was said to be entangled with the too well-known Ameena.

Irene had been wondering why neither messages nor letters came from her betrothed, and Constantine, fearing that some communication should reach either the one or the other, resolved to hasten the unfolding of his plot. With well-dissembled grief and anger he announced to her that Selim had given lavish promises mixed with threats to Ashbourne, under which he had revoked his promise to marry her.

"I cannot believe this," she said; "he is too manly and honourable to do that. You must be deceived."

"No; I am not deceived. He returned the letter you sent, and said that he could not carry out the engagement, not wishing to stand in the way of the prince. I went to him and heard it from his own lips. Do you wish I should go again and implore him to marry you?"

"And did you, who wear a sword, suffer a man to give such an insult to your sister?"

"In truth," said Constantine, "the Feringhi had his soldiers near him; and as for the sword, for I like to tell the straight truth, he can use the sword better than I. What gain would it be to you that I should be killed trying to force a man to marry you?"

An enormous weight seemed to settle on Irene's mind; the world seemed to get dark, the sun to lose its light. Her distress was too great for tears. "Oh, how sad my life," she at last cried out; "where shall I fly to escape this shame and outrage."

Though Constantine was really sorry for her, he had resolved to carry out his plan to the end. He sought

to console her, and even ventured after a time to speak of the passion the Prince Selim must have for her; but as this only roused her indignation, he judged it best to wait for another occasion, which soon came.

"This I shall tell you," he observed; "if you wish to escape falling into the hands of the Prince Selim, you are not safe here. The house is too open and too lonely."

"But surely the fear of the emperor would prevent any violence?" she said.

"I do not know. If you were once in the prince's hands, he would get you conveyed away somewhere, and even if the emperor heard of it, he would try to look favourably on it. He always tries to think well of his sons. Those who complain against them meet their own ruin. Nevertheless, whatever may befall me, I am going to complain to the emperor about the disgrace you have suffered. You will yet hear of it, only let me choose the best time. Perhaps the emperor may think that the prince did you great honour. There is no doubt that the prince is passionately in love with you; and it is my belief that he would marry you."

"Never will such a thing take place," she exclaimed; "I would rather throw myself into the Jumna. Selim has done me injury enough. Than his wife, the mother of Sultan Begum, there is no woman more unhappy."

"Do nothing rash, dear sister," answered Constantine. "But it seems to me that you distress yourself over much about this Feringhi who has used you so basely. Have you no pride? But this it is needful to say—if

you wish to escape Selim, do not stay here. He knows that you are here, and this house is too open. He has many people ready to do his pleasure."

"But where can I go? My father and mother are dead; I have no home. Shall I go back to the Begum Rukayat, who will see that the emperor does me justice? It is only shame that prevents me, but perhaps only in this does safety lie."

This, of course, Constantine did not want, for it would have led directly to the exposure of his own falsehood. He could easily see that Irene would suffer much humiliation by returning to the mahal, which she had just left under the belief she would make a happy marriage, and by presenting this consideration to her mind, he soon turned her thoughts away from such a project. He had his own arrangement ready where his sister should go. In the house of his worthy friend, Ismail Sharif, he said she would be quite safe and kindly treated till the danger should be past, when they would both leave together, and return to the mountain land of their fathers in Armenia. This idea was pleasing to the desolate maiden, who felt sick of India. Thus he had so little difficulty in so acting on her hopes and fears, that she consented to his proposal. As soon as it was dark she was borne in a covered litter to the house of Ismail Sharif, who was in reality one of the creatures of the Prince Selim. Sharif's wife, Canzade, was a Persian woman, lively and clever, but somewhat ambitious, who went into her husband's schemes. She received Irene with well-feigned declara-

tions of sympathy. They had a beautiful house. Canzade led Irene down a stair to the *taikhana*, or underground storey, the windows of which opened so near the Jumna, that its broad expanse of waters, and the dim outline of the opposite bank, was the only sight that greeted the eye. Canzade pointed out to her guest that here she would have quietness and safety. They were all interested in her fortune, and would do their best to cheer her. Irene's heart melted with the sympathy of one of her own sex, and she gave a frank account of her disappointment and affliction, and of her suspicions that her brother was too favourable to the designs of Selim.

Canzade knew well how to play her part. She inveighed against the meanness of Ashbourne, and brought the report of his marriage, without mentioning any names. At the same time she tried to put as favourable a gloss as she could upon the prince's conduct, who, she said, was passionately in love with her. Irene, though young, confiding, and ignorant of the world, had a quick intelligence, and felt that something was wrong. The shock she had received was deep and lasting; her sleep came with difficulty, and when it did come it was made fearful by vivid dreams. She thought that she was flying, and that the Prince Selim was pursuing her, and her brother grasped her hand as if to help her flight; but he would not run as fast as she wished. She thought that Ashbourne was behind them all, only he never reached them. Then all at once they appeared within a ring of

eunuchs, who joined their hands together, and screamed in their high-pitched voices a chorus of mocking laughter. She awoke, with a shudder, again to fall asleep and dream another dream, in which the same thought took another shape. Everything roused her fears; the slightest sound made her tremble. She felt alone, more than alone, in a world where every one would do her wrong, would mock, outrage, or betray her. If the angel of death had entered and said, "Come with me, my daughter," she would have put her hand in his, and gone, at anyrate, out of a world that had become insupportably painful. Would it be a sin, she thought, to spring into the wide river? There remained upward in her mind one sentiment of repugnance to Selim, who had, in his enormous selfishness, alienated and corrupted her friends, and filled her cup with bitterness. Her fears were too alert not to notice that she was watched. This increased her alarm, and she observed that the door at the foot of the stair was kept closed. The suggestions of Canzade and her waiting-women increased her suspicions, and she determined to leave the house, putting on her mantle and bhoorkha, when she presently found that she was in reality a prisoner, for the women detained her, and sent for their mistress, who soon came.

"I understand now you wish to keep me a prisoner."

"But where would you go?" said Canzade.

"I wish to go into the world. Do not stop me. I trust you not."

"Wait till your brother comes," said Canzade.

“No, I shall not. I have ceased to trust him either, since he brought me here. I am a free woman. You are all bent on giving me up to Selim, but I warn you that the emperor will do me justice. He listened to the complaints of some poor woman in Shaitanpurah, and some of the courtiers suffered death. Beware ! Though his son Selim may escape, his justice will fall upon you. Let me go.”

Canzade was somewhat afraid. No doubt, if it came to the ears of the emperor, they might be severely punished. However, Selim was to come that evening, and then they hoped the matter would end, as far as they were concerned ; so Canzade sat beside Irene, trying to soothe her, and engage her in conversation. But hour after hour of the night passed away, and the prince did not come.

Up to this time circumstances had wonderfully favoured his plot ; and indeed, if it had been the only one the prince was engaged in, he might have carried it through with a further degree of success. But at this very time his intrigues and efforts to corrupt the courtiers, in order to supplant his father, had gone so far that Akber's old ministers and generals warned him of the danger. They were able to produce such evidence that the emperor ordered Selim to be suddenly arrested and sent to Fathpur Sikri. Several of his confidants were at the same time apprehended. Sharif, who had reason to fear for himself, returned to his own house about two hours before sunset, burned some papers, got some money ready, and prepared for

flight. The dialogue between him and his wife was brief and business-like.

“I have to fly at once, or my head would not be safe. The prince has been arrested, with some of his friends, and word has come to us that they are going to put me also in prison. They will not hurt you, as you are not concerned in those matters; but if they come here to arrest me, they will search the whole house. If they find that Armenian girl here, she will tell many things that will do us harm.”

“What can I do?” asked Canzade. “You brought her here most imprudently, and very little for my pleasure. Shall I send her back to her brother? Perhaps he, too, will be arrested, and perhaps she will not be willing to go to him, for she has begun to suspect him. She asked to be set free, and would have gone away to-night had I not stopped her.”

“I have no time,” replied Sharif, “to make up a plan how to get rid of her. Do what you like with her. I trust to you devising some scheme, for now I must be gone.”

And so he mounted his swiftest horse, and hurried away.

Canzade, though far from scrupulous, yet had felt for Irene, and was scarcely sorry that the plot to put her into the power of Selim had failed. She was now more anxious to get rid of her unlucky guest than she had been to detain her, especially as she foresaw that other evils were likely to come, which would require all her skill to avoid. No time was to be lost, so

she determined to get rid of Irene in a summary manner.

She is so full of fears, said Canzade to herself, that it will be easy to scare her out of the house. So she walked in a friendly manner into Irene's apartment, and soon led the conversation to the point she wanted.

"It is not my fault you have been kept here. Pity for you has touched my heart, and, if you are seriously resolved not to countenance the advances of Prince Selim, I advise you to leave this place, for he purposes sending for you this very day."

"I wished to leave this house," replied Irene, surprised at this change of front, "and you would not let me."

"Because," replied Canzade, telling the truth for once, "my husband would have prevented me. Now he has gone out of the way for a short time. Now I can help you. Listen to me. I cannot openly let you go; but, if you put on this old cloak over your own, you may steal away by a path which I shall show you. Only this you must promise, that you never will tell that you have been kept here. If you cannot promise this, I shall not let you go."

Irene, full of her fears, readily made the promise exacted; but, like a frightened bird, the door of whose cage has been suddenly opened, she hesitated to leave, fearing some plot, and implored the future help of Canzade. The artful Mussulmani took her to a window, and made her look out, when she saw some men advancing towards the house. These she represented

as creatures of Selim coming to seize her, although she had a shrewd suspicion that they were some guards sent to arrest her own husband.

“Fly,” said Canzade, “while there is time ; or, if you wish, you have only to stay.”

In a paroxysm of terror Irene declared her desire to go. A servant showed her the way by which Sharif had made his escape more than an hour before, and a few minutes later, the bewildered girl was left alone on a road behind the house, in the early morning, carrying her jewels and some money in a casket in her hand. Canzade engaged, with much kindness, to look after her other effects, and to send a servant after her, who never appeared.

Luckily, Irene met a poor woman on the road, who told her where she could find the house of Ghias Beg, a Persian poet, who had risen in the service of Akber. His wife had been the friend of her mother, and his daughter, Mihrunisa, had been her own dearest friend. There, Irene thought, she would find protection and redress ; but how her poor heart sunk when, on reaching the house, she found it empty. Ghias Beg had quite recently gone to Kabul, of which he had been made governor, taking his family with him. The servant left in charge of the house, seeing a young woman veiled and covered, answered her inquiries with little courtesy, and was beginning to ask some rude questions, when Irene turned and fled away.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MISSION-HOUSE OF THE FATHERS OF ST. PAUL—
EMANUEL PIGNEIRO — MARIA PEREIRA — JESUIT
INTRIGUES.

WE must now turn to some old acquaintances, settled in Agra, the Fathers of St. Paul.

From a view of the mission buildings of the Jesuit Fathers, one might infer that they had wealth at their disposal, and that they meant their order should have a durable footing in Agra. The whole pile of buildings had the form of an L. The row began with the façade of a handsome church, built of stone in the Spanish style. The main entrance was surmounted by a pediment; and at each angle was a square tower, rising in two storeys above the roof of the church. In the upper storey of each tower hung a large bell, and each cupola roof was surmounted by a cross.

On a line with the front of the church stood the house where the Fathers lived. It had a pillared verandah both in front and behind, with covered balconies on the second storey. The grey of the thick thatched roof contrasted with the whitewash which covered the walls

of the house and pillars of the verandah. Against the gable wall of the mission-house there was a small chapel, with high windows, and no entrance from the outside. Behind this chapel was a smaller house, inhabited by three religieuses. The end of the L was completed by a long, one-storeyed building, used as a hospital for sick and destitute women. The body of the church ran farther back than the mission-houses, and in the angle between began the garden, which covered the whole rear of the building. Behind, the garden was enclosed by a high mud wall, and it was separated into three by two division walls. The bit of garden for the use of the Fathers was square, one side being bounded by the church, another by the mission-house. The garden of the religieuses was behind the chapel and their house, and the third garden covered the back and extremity of the one-storeyed hospital.

In front of the whole row of buildings was an open space, planted with several rows of trees. At present, the Father Jerome Xavier is away on some business at Lahore, where they had a church. So we may pay some attention to our old acquaintance, the Father Emanuel Pigneiro, who is now seated before a table in a good-sized room, which opens into the front verandah of the mission house. The Father is writing in Arabic characters, from right to left, a controversial tract in Hindustani, which he will give to be copied by native clerks, in sufficient numbers for distribution in proper quarters. On the table, amongst his papers and writing materials, lie some astronomical instruments.

At the farthest side of the room is a smaller table, with a crucifix. On one side-wall hangs a good picture of the Madonna and Child; on the opposite side of the room, a plain, black wooden bookcase stands against the white wall. There are about fifty books, mostly folios and quartos, on history and languages, as well as treatises on mathematics, natural philosophy, and medicine, with a few books on theology and morals, principally by Spanish authors, in which matters of faith are made difficult, and moral obligations are made easy.

The Father Emanuel Pigneiro, an Italian by birth, was a tall, rather stout man. His face would have been oval, but for the roundness of his wide cheeks; his eyes were large and black, keen rather than brilliant. For a European, his complexion was somewhat tawny, and the lower portion of his face had a deeper colour from his beard, which was rarely so closely shaven as not to be visible on a close inspection. His head was covered with short, stiff black hair, save on a small spot on the crown, reserved for the clerical tonsure. He wore a *soutane*, and trousers of black serge, with a rosary round his neck. His manner was deferential to his superiors, suave to his equals, and benign and paternal to inferiors; though sometimes, when crossed, he lost command of his features, and then his face was not pleasant to look on. Of great capacity and powers of application, he had been highly educated, to fit him for important parts in the missionary enterprises of the Jesuits. Not only was he learned in history and languages, like Jerome Xavier, but Pigneiro was skilled

in mathematics and astronomy. Having less of courtly grace than his superior, he was more persistent and less scrupulous. Coming to a Court where learning was held in honour, the Jesuit Fathers made no pretensions to extreme austerity or severe penances, as they clearly saw that, in this respect, they must fall behind the religious devotees of India. They used the fittest, rather than the holiest means to advance their designs. It must be borne in mind that they were inexorably faithful to the grand aim of their lives—the propagation of the Catholic faith. To those who did not think this of supreme importance, some of their proceedings might appear mischievous and time-serving; and even those who sympathised with their ends, were sometimes shocked by the expedients they used to advance their power over men's minds. They became learned that they might gain charge of the instruction of the youth. They used the confessional not only to exhort, but to learn the mazes of human character, and gain intelligence of the secret doings of men. The arm of power, the attractions of wealth, and the influence of women, were all used to help in the great game of salvation played against the enemy of mankind.

A native servant now entered, with bare feet and noiseless tread, and with a deep salaam, asked the Father to come to see a man who was dangerously ill.

The Father, putting on a broad-brimmed black hat, hastened away with the attendant to a place in the rear of the church and garden, where was a number of houses and huts of different ages, inhabited by the

servants and hangers-on of the mission, who might number about two hundred people. Amongst them were low-caste children who had lost their parents, and deserted old men, driven by starvation to allow themselves to be baptised. On two of the biggest houses, which had once belonged to Hindus of the richer class, one could still distinguish, under a covering of white-wash, some of those grotesque drawings, in coloured chalk, of Hindu gods, with which natives of India are wont to variegate the outside of their houses. Other pictures had been replaced by sketches in the same style of art, of scenes from the legends of the saints. In some places the old Pagan drawings had been merely retouched. Krishna, on the top of a tree, after stealing the clothes of the milkmaid, had been replaced by an inferior drawing of Christ on the Cross. The milkmaids still did for the holy women who gathered round the foot of the Cross. Huniman and his monkeys had been adroitly retouched into devils, and the besieging of the city of Lanka been heightened into rather an incongruous picture of hell-fire. Under a tree some of the mahogany-coloured children were playing with a little altar, which they had themselves decorated with a mud image, also of their own manufacture.

“Where is the sick man?” said Father Pigneiro, after glancing around.

The servant pointed to a hut, which they entered. A young Hindu was stretched on the ground, his head on the lap of an old woman, whose ashy grey hair, and

dry, withered, brown face presented a fantastic contrast to the bright silver ornaments she wore on her hands and bare arms. The face of the young man seemed swollen, the eyes red and heavy, and every now and then an inarticulate sound came from his mouth.

“What is the matter?” asked the Father, of one of those standing around. “Is he dying?”

“This is the mother of Nathu, who became Christian, and whom your holiness took to live with us.”

The young man was a Hindu convert, who had been the support of his family, and his mother, deploring his apostacy, and the loss of caste to which he had been subjected, had done her utmost to try to bring him back to his old habits of life; but, finding her persuasions useless, she had been induced to buy a philter from a professional sorcerer, and to put it in his food, in order to bring her son back to his own kindred. The drug had produced poisonous effects, and the old woman was bewailing the mischief she had wrought.

“What have you done?” cried the Father to her. “You have poisoned your own son.”

“It is all your work,” cried the old woman passionately. “Why do you come here leading away the minds of our children? Are there none of your own caste in Feringhistan? Why do you not remain there?”

“Poor woman,” said the Father in a pitying tone “I came to free you and all your race from the dreadful punishment which awaits you.”

“What punishment?” asked the woman scornfully.

“From the wrath of God, which you have deserved by your sins and unbelief. Have you never heard of the dreadful fate which will overtake you in the next world, if you do not follow the example of your son, and give up the worship of idols?”

“I was born in my own religion by the will of God, and how will He punish me because I remain in it?” replied the old woman.

The young man here gave some signs of returning consciousness, and Pigneiro did everything he could to remove the effects of the drug. In half-an-hour he was able to sit up and speak a little. The Father, with great skill and gentleness, impressed upon the woman the danger of such attempts. It required little speaking to make her promise not to begin them again, and at length he induced her to stay beside her son, under the hope of, in the end, making her a convert to the faith.

“It is better for me to stay beside my son,” muttered the old woman, “since my brothers will not receive me; but I shall never eat the flesh of cows. Perhaps his judgment will come back to him, and then we shall return to our caste.”

Pigneiro was on the way back to his house, when he met another servant, who informed him that a veiled woman was seated on the steps of the altar, and desired to see the Father Xavier or the mother superior. Entering the church, he gazed a few moments at the trembling figure. Her head and face were completely

covered by the bhoorkha, and her body was shrouded by a long covering of muslin. She turned towards him as he approached.

Pigneiro said shortly, "I am told you asked for the Father Jerome; he is away just now, but I am, for the time, in his place. Is there anything I can do for your good?"

After a short pause, the answer came in a low, agitated voice—

"I am come to beg shelter and protection, as one of the Christian faith. I know the sister Maria, and hope she will give me refuge in my need."

"Who, then, are you?" asked the Father.

"I am Irene," she replied, "the daughter of Elias, the Armenian. I have been deserted by my promised husband, and my brother wishes to give me up to the Prince Selim; and, in this distress, I have come here to ask your help." She then, in broken sentences, related the course of events, such as they had occurred to her.

Though Pigneiro was in general pretty well informed about things which happened at Court, and even within the enclosure of the seraglio, this was quite new to him, and not without interest. He desired to know more, and have time for reflection. He, therefore, sent a message to the superior to come to the church.

"This," said he to her, "is Irene, the Armenian damsel whom you already know. She has come to us for refuge from worldly oppressors. May it be the occasion of her gaining eternal refuge from those who

destroy the soul. It is well that no one, at present, should know where she is. Take her away quietly to your quarters. I shall soon be able to speak more to you about it."

The sister superior Maria was the daughter of the merchant, James Pereira, who had brought the miraculously preserved, or secretly embalmed, body of Francis Xavier from Malacca to Goa.

She was born in Goa, but had been educated at Lisbon. Married to a Portuguese gentleman, she had gone with him to Diu, where his infidelities had caused her much distress and indignation. Her husband died after a short illness, when she was left a rich widow with no children. Having now become her own mistress, she determined never to marry again, but to devote her talents to the conversion of the people of India. Being a woman of much energy, she had no idea of getting herself shut up in a cloister to pass the rest of her life in prayers, telling her beads and doing needlework. Her favourite saint was Catherine of Sienna. Most of the religious orders, such as the Cistercians, Franciscans, and Dominicans, had female sisterhoods with similar rules; but then both monks and nuns lived in cloistered convents. The Jesuits, on the other hand, though they took the vows of poverty, and chastity, and obedience, by no means led a life of contemplation, and had their work in the outside world. It was not known how the order of female Jesuits arose, in fact little is known about them. At this time they were numerous in Italy, and the South of France

and Germany. They were finally abolished in 1631 by a Bull of the Pope Urban VIII. Professing to be a member of such a sisterhood, Maria came to Agra with two companions, and soon made herself very useful to the Fathers, getting access to the wives of the grandees and the ladies of the seraglio, and making converts amongst poor and deserted women by a mingled system of teaching and almsgiving. She was allowed to add to the profess-house, the chapel, dwelling, and hospital already mentioned; and here she found vent for her restless zeal, or what some might call her intriguing spirit. At this time Sister Maria was about forty years of age. Without being beautiful, she had an intelligent face and delicately pencilled eye-brows. Her head was shaved, and in the house she rarely wore anything beyond a light gauze cap. When she went out she wore the black hood and veil, and hung round her lithe and active form the hearse-like drapings of the nun. When it seemed expedient, however, she could put on the ordinary dress of Portuguese women, or cover her head with the bhoorkha of the Mussulmani. Though fond of power and full of zeal for the faith, Maria had a good deal of active benevolence. Her heart took kindly to the deserted Armenian maiden. She brought the trembling girl within her dwelling, where the three sisters soothed her and listened to her story with sympathetic interest.

“I have lived in the world,” observed Sister Maria, “and know the falseness of men. You have done well, my daughter, in coming to us, and I hope you will

be confirmed in your intentions of devoting your endeavours to the service of Christ. When one ceases to desire the vain and feverish joys of the world, the mind first knows contentment."

Nevertheless it occurred to the sister, who had lived in the world, that there was something strange in Irene's story. Sister Clara, less discreet, had hinted as much to Irene, and they were somewhat startled when the latter asked them if they would make some inquiries about what was doing in the outer world. They all wanted Irene to join their little company. She had brought some jewels with her which would enrich the sisterhood, and they all were of opinion that she would soon throw off her despondency, and become an intelligent and useful member of their mission, from her knowledge of Indian life and her acquaintance with Persian and Hindustani. It was a luxury to have one so young and lovely amongst them, and they consulted together what they should do to make her stay agreeable, and to soften the first steps towards a life of devotion.

In the meantime the Father Pigneiro was talking with the Brother Benedict de Goes about this strange arrival.

"I should like to know how much is correct in all this?" said he coolly.

"It strikes me also, Father," rejoined Benedict, "that it may not all be true what she says. The Armenian Constantine is a caitiff, and would yield to the threats of the prince; but the Englishman is proud and brave.

I doubt whether he would be willing to yield the damsel up, either for fear or for money. I think the real situation must have been concealed from him."

"That may be," said the Father coldly; "only we must consider how, through all this, the cause of the faith should be advanced. They say that the Prince Selim has been arrested by the order of the emperor, who has heard of some of his intrigues. I wonder whether his fancy for this young woman is likely to last. Make inquiry what the English heretic is doing; but, remember, communicate with no one save me till the Father Jerome returns. I must see the Sister Maria, and tell her to be cautious in this matter."

At one corner of the chapel there was a confessional, from which the Jesuits could converse with the sisters through the bars without leaving their own house. Maria did not like Emanuel Pigneiro, but she feared him. Though he was constrained to admit that the daughters of Eve had an influence in human affairs which it would be imprudent to despise, the Jesuit had no great opinion of women. He did not approve of their association in the profess-house, and adopted an ironical tone in talking to the sisters, which they disliked. On the contrary, Jerome Xavier was their friend, and they could manage to influence him in many things.

As the superior was away, Maria had to obey the summons of Pigneiro, and to listen to his views about how Irene should be entertained. It soon appeared

that the Father's tactics were different from the Sister Maria's. She was anxious that her interesting young protégée should become a member of the mission, and if the Englishman had not been a heretic, she might even have proposed as an alternative that some explanation should pass between him and Irene, so that the interrupted marriage might be put on a favourable train. The idea of delivering up Irene to Prince Selim never occurred to Maria, and she was somewhat startled at the worldly politics of the Jesuit Father.

"What benefit," he asked, "would accrue to the faith from this girl becoming a religieuse? She would never be safe here in Agra, and if we conveyed her away, she would probably end by going into a nunnery at Goa or in Portugal. Do not encourage this fancy; perhaps she is destined to accomplish a much greater work, and to bring the whole of India to the faith."

"How can that be?" asked the sister, somewhat surprised.

"Have you not read," said Pigneiro, "how the kingdom of the Franks was brought to the faith by Clotilda, the wife of Clovis, and how much Bertha, the wife of the King of Kent, helped St. Augustine to introduce the gospel into England? These are not the only examples of what believing women have done for the faith. You say that the damsel is beautiful, alluring, and of rare wit and intelligence, and I have heard it said that Selim is easily led by women. In time he will be the ruler of this great empire, and should he be

turned to the faith the whole of India might be brought to the truth."

"Then you wish that Irene should be given up to the prince?" asked the sister, in whom the woman was not entirely lost in the religieuse.

"Not at present," replied the Father; "we must keep her by us for a while until her mind is cleared of the Nestorian heresy, and she is aware of the greatness of her mission. In the meantime we must not be too hasty to lead her into a life of religious contemplation, when she might do so much more good by again entering the world."

"But these women, Clotilda, and the other," objected the sister, "were the lawful wives of the kings they converted. Do you think you will be able to get Selim to promise to marry Irene, or would you have her delivered up to live a life of sin?"

"Of a truth," replied the Father, "it would be better for the spread of our holy faith that she become the only wife of the prince, and thus be empress of India. Nevertheless, consider the greatness of the end, consider what is best for the salvation of the perishing millions of India, consider what great things Judith did for the deliverance of her people." And so the colloquy ended in Maria promising to support the policy of the wily Jesuit, to gain an empire over the mind of Irene, and to direct her thoughts to sacrifice herself for the conversion of India.

When Maria returned to her own quarters, Irene, who was very sensitive to shades of manner, instantly

noticed a difference in the address of the religieuse. Not that she was less kind, for she seemed more so, yet the quality of the kindness was changed. But as Irene strove to think favourably of her new friends, the delicate impression wore away. In a few days she noticed the same subtle change of manner in the two other sisters, who bore the names of Theresa and Agatha. Irene knew little of the world save the small part of it which was enclosed within the walls of the seraglio. There lived in luxury and splendour the begums and princesses and favourites of a great and conquering king. Begum meant literally without care. Everything which they desired was brought to them, no matter at what cost. Nothing but what was pleasing was suffered to enter. They lived in apartments of polished marble and mosaics, amongst beautiful gardens, kept ever fresh and well watered, under a glowing sun. The air was cooled by fountains, and there were underground grottos to retire from the heats of summer, and female slaves to fan them and dress them. They wore the lightest and costliest of silks, and jewels sparkled at every motion they made. The most delicious perfumes and the choicest music filled the air. Every sense was cultivated, that it might have a more exquisite zest for pleasure. Amusement was pursued as the most important of arts.

In this soft atmosphere Irene had lived for about eight years. Her accomplishments were such as had pleased the great ladies, and she had been kindly treated. Though she had not gone without education,

she had never been constrained to do anything distasteful to her. The change to the bare, little room in the dwelling of the religieuses was strange and hard, but Irene felt it less, as it suited a reaction in her mind.

It is the error of the inexperienced to imagine that happiness may be made out of a series of pleasant sensations. Life to be really enjoyed must have its changes, transitions, and reactions. Nature herself will effect this, however much art may try to arrange circumstances to baulk her.

There is a class of minds to whom continual merriment becomes distasteful, and a sustained series of amusements and excitements is felt as a positive annoyance. They long to have leisure and quiet that they may examine their own selves, consider what is taking place within them, and whither they are going. There comes a time when they are ready to cry out, O world, what art thou to me with all thy painted shows and bright-coloured pageants? Thou art ever showing thyself as an actor, not as a friend. I am wearied of the continuous procession of the seasons. Thy changes have ceased to surprise me. I know that thou wilt leave the white blossoms of spring to wither in the heats of summer, and will scatter the flowers of summer and the fruits of autumn over the frozen breast of winter. To every friend I have on this earth I must bid farewell; fain would I have to do with One whose relations to me shall never cease. Why not seek Him at once? Why scatter my thoughts for a moment upon any other? Man is not made for joy alone. In the human breast

there is a principle of melancholy which seeks gratification in the pleasure of witnessing, even of sharing in a tragedy. Even those most fearful of pain, and anxious to lead a joyous life, have an involuntary respect for those who disdain the pleasures they pursue. In this lies the strength of asceticism or stoicism. If dangers surround you, if cares overwhelm you, if poverty always stand before you holding behind her back what your heart desires, do not be so weak as to sigh or weep for what is beyond your reach. Wrap yourself up in resignation, or go boldly to face the evils that approach you, and instantly their power to hurt begins to wane. If joy then run after you, treat him as one you do not trust. Say to him, You may stay with me as long as I am not busy, and then go to deceive some one else.

The three missionary sisters paid great attention to Irene. They taught her Portuguese, and gave her some books of devotion in that language, especially the meditations of Ludolph of Saxony. They called her Margarida, after a Scottish queen, who they told her had done much for the Catholic faith. They spent their time in devotional exercises, and in nursing the sick women who sought their aid. They were very anxious to pick up deserted children, whom they got baptised. If the children died before they wore off their baptismal innocence, this was a kind of comfort, for they went to heaven. Such children they got hold of were sometimes claimed by their relations, or those who pretended to be so, which was the occasion of stiff disputes. Their patience and charity seemed something less attractive

by the strong tincture of propagandism which they infused into everything. The Jesuits spent a good deal of money, and were very anxious to have more. The presents they got from Akber, though enough to maintain them, were quite insufficient to support their undertakings. They tried to raise money from divers sources. A good deal of miscellaneous trade was done at the profess-house. They got European stuffs, pictures, and other works of art, anything that might be desired in Agra. They were floated up the Ganges and Jumna from Hooghly, or brought overland from Bassein or Diu. In this line the female Jesuits did some traffic amongst the wives of the grandees or the ladies of the seraglio. In payment they would take gold or jewels. Sister Maria went about the houses of wealthy widow ladies, who, if they did not openly profess the Christian religion, were inclined to favour it. In spite of this unwholesome mixture of sanctity and worldly craft, Irene would have been easily led into entering a religious life, but somehow or other Maria always held her back, or the other sister warned her or persuaded her not to be hasty in taking vows which she might repent when in a different mood. While infusing into her mind a sense of the importance of the Catholic faith, they tried to revive her taste for the things of the world. The jewels she offered them they put aside, saying she might yet need them to adorn herself. Beauty like hers was a power in the world. She could gain such an empire over men's hearts that she might greatly advance the faith. It was a difficult task while

trying to turn her attention to the world, and at the same time to create a missionary zeal, and insure the subjugation of her understanding. In spite of the directions of Father Pigneiro, her education in doctrinal matters did not progress so well as they desired. Though Irene had considered it a point of honour to remain a Christian, she had not received any careful instruction in the doctrinal parts of the faith. If there was a sceptical tone in the Court of Akber, in the seraglio there was an easy indifference to particular forms of faith. The Rajput princesses, with whom Akber had sought unions for himself and his sons, had ceased to become Hindus without really becoming Mahomedans. Some of them who took, or pretended to take, an interest in religion professed to be converts to the Divine faith, but there was little zeal. When Irene heard the doctrine that all the good-natured inmates of the seraglio were doomed to eternal damnation because they did not belong to the same faith as the Fathers of St. Paul, she received the statement with evident doubts. To their lectures on the difference between the Catholic and the Nestorian Churches she listened without a trace of interest. The talk of the sisters about her beauty and charm of manner being a power in the world only gave her pain. Had she not been abandoned by the man to whom she was betrothed, to whom her heart had gone forth? She began to wonder if all this were a dream. That her brother Constantine had proved treacherous was hardly a surprise to her; her faith in him had received some shocks,

but the young Englishman, had he really been so ready to let her go? If she ventured to allude to him, the sisters looked displeased. Maria told her all she knew was that the English heretic had married some woman, whom it was she did not know. Could this be true? That at anyrate she could test for herself. She looked out for some one whom she could employ, but this was not easy, for she soon perceived that without showing it the sisters watched her closely.

The old woman Sandal, the mother of Nathu, was employed as a servant in the hospital. Several times Irene prepared to speak to her, but the words died on her lips. At last she took the old woman aside, and whispered:

“Go to Ahorapur and see what Ashbourne, the Angrezi, is doing.”

The old woman readily promised.

“Whatever message the lady sent shall reach him.”

“No! no!” cried she, “see what he is doing; if he lives alone. Do not let them here know anything of it, nor tell any one I have sent you.”

“I understand, lady,” answered the old woman, in a soft voice.

“Here is a pearl for you. Now go.”

“I never believed,” said the crone to herself, “what these Portuguese women said, that they never care for men. A likely story! They are like other women. For my part, I am old and withered; but were I young and beautiful like her, I should not want a man. It is wonderful none has yet come to seek her. Where the

cherries grow there the stones fall. I wonder who she is. If I could see the Angrezi, he might give me something for telling where she is. I wonder how much this pearl is worth?"

Having sold the pearl for what she could get, the old woman, after a few alterations in her attire, set out for the artillery quarters at Ahorapur.

In the evening she was back with her news; but it was not till next day that she got an opportunity of speaking to Irene. Not being troubled with too much delicacy, the old woman went straight to the point.

"The Feringhi is newly married. I saw him seated with his wife in the verandah behind the house. She is beautiful; though not so beautiful as you. I crept along amongst the guava trees, pretending to be a beggar, but the gardener came and pushed me away. The servants say that she dislikes Hindu women, and will not suffer them to come near her, but it seems to me that she herself——"

"What is that to me," interrupted Irene; "speak no more of it."

When Jerome Xavier returned from Lahore he was, at first, dissatisfied with the policy of his lieutenant, as a superior is generally disposed to object to a novel resolution taken in his absence. Nevertheless, Pigneiro was soon able to persuade him to favour the intrigue. He urged that, by informing the emperor about the deceit played upon Ashbourne, they would incur the hatred of Selim without really gaining the goodwill of his father. The only one who would profit would be

the heretic Englishman. On the other hand, the possession of the secret gave them a hold over the prince, and if his passion for Irene continued to occupy his mind, and if they could succeed in creating a permanent interest in her mind in favour of their mission, the consequences might be that not only Selim, but the whole of India might be gained over to the faith. The fact that Selim was under arrest, at anyrate, gave them time to work upon the mind of the fair Armenian.

Father Jerome was admitted to an interview with the prince, and adroitly imparted that they were aware where the fugitive lady had taken refuge. Not accustomed to such an opposition to his desires, Selim was eager that she should be put in his power, and was ready to make great promises. The Father, at the same time, engaged to use his influence with the emperor to get the prince free from the irritating confinement in which he was held.

After a time, the placable monarch was induced to forgive his unworthy son, upon fervid professions of amendment. Selim, like a wild animal let out of a trap, returned without delay to his government at Allahabad. Hither he expected Irene to be sent after him, but the Jesuits were not disposed to do this without some delay, for they found a great difficulty in gaining that complete control over the mind of Irene which was necessary for the success of their intriguing designs. It is impossible to weigh down the youthful mind with sorrow, the reaction is sure to come, so when the first feelings of desolation were over, Irene felt

bright thoughts struggling through the gloom. Though anxious to adapt her mind to her new condition, there were many things against which her nature rebelled. The confinement was too close; her thoughts would not stay within the narrow circle of the Jesuits' devotional exercises. Then their ideas of the conversion of India, by one successful intrigue, seemed too vast and shadowy to be interesting. There were jealousies and differences within the walls of the profess-house. Had it not been for the tact and skilful management of Maria, Irene would have broken away from them, when she fairly understood that they wished her to put herself in the power of Selim.

"I tell you," she said, "that he is callously selfish, that he has no religious belief, and wishes to have none. If you put me in his power, he would soon throw me aside, and all the sooner that I wished him to profess being a Christian."

Of course they had their arguments, ingenious and steadily sustained, which, in the end, wrought upon the imagination of the young girl. The news of the death of Ashbourne was reported to her, and, in spite of her pride, the tears flowed over her cheeks.

Messages came and went between the prince and the Jesuit Fathers. He would marry the damsel, do anything—or, at least, promise to do anything. Then he used threats, which were not pleasant, only the Jesuits judged that he could not execute them as long as his father lived. Would she not sacrifice her dislikes to be the means of leading the future ruler of India to the

faith? Why not try to conquer her repugnance to a destiny which most women would envy? So many motives, spiritual and temporal, were diligently suggested and urged, that at last they gained from her a passive consent to their scheme.

Utterly alone, and craving sympathy, she tried to blend her thoughts with these people who were kind to her. Everything which they said and did took one colour. Nevertheless, there were periods of revulsion, when repugnance gained the upper hand, and she thought of flight, but where to go she knew not. Brought up in the seraglio, where her wants were supplied without effort on her part, she was quite unaccustomed to act for herself. The intense workings of her thoughts and feelings made her sleepless. Wild ideas entered her mind, which she treated as temptations of the devil. One day she was seated in the garden, motionless, while the eddy of her thoughts went on unceasingly, when the old woman, Sandal, approached her, put into her hand a letter in Persian, and then stole away. Going into a place where she thought she would be unobserved, Irene read the letter, which, suppressing some superfluous flourishings, conventional in an Oriental letter, may be translated as follows:—

“MIHRUNISA TO HER FRIEND IRENE.

“I have become acquainted with the deceit which has been practised on you. Through the threats of Selim, and the treachery of your brother, you were scared away. A woman was put in your stead to take your name and play your part. The Englishman, having escaped death in the

South, has at last found out the trick played upon him, and now he seeks to mend his torn heart by finding out where you are. Trust not the Portuguese padres. In me, a friend still remains to you, though I, myself, am wretched. Send what message you desire, through Sandal, the Chamarin, who works in the hospital of the Christian sisters."

As one groping in the darkness is shown all the dangers of his situation by a flash of lightning, so a new position of affairs was brought into view by this short letter. Irene read it again and again, but she had taken in every word at the first reading, only she would like to know more. What had become of this woman who had supplanted her? What manner of woman could she be? Could any man live with such a woman, and not notice what she was?

Maria, who watched Irene closely, noticed some change in her manner, and asked what was the cause of it.

Irene gave an evasive reply. She was not disposed to confidence, for her suspicions were fully awake. She recalled that she had sent messages to several friends in Agra, but had got no answers. She had attributed this to the fear of offending the prince; but now she began to ask, were these messages ever delivered? Were things going on beyond the walls of the mission-house really as the Jesuits represented? She had seen enough to make her suspect that these missionaries would sacrifice everything and everybody to further their own schemes.

The mother superior informed the Father Xavier of

the change she had noticed in her charge, from whom they had hoped so much.

"Irene is becoming perverse. I saw her watching me. I do not like her look. She has something on her mind. I heard her talking to herself in her room last night. I could not make out what it was. I should not be surprised if she tried to leave us."

"You surely can watch her so as to prevent that," replied the Father.

"That would be difficult if she were determined to escape. The sisters are tired with watching, and getting impatient. Women cannot be got to do everything. Irene might persuade them to take her part. She is not quite as clay in the hand of the potter. You risk something every day by keeping her here."

"Then you think that she should be sent away," said Father Jerome, his thoughts taking the same direction. "I have heard that inquiries are being made in the city where she is."

"I suspect she has had some word from without. You had better send her away, reverend father, before she changes her resolution."

This was enough to make the Jesuit nervous.

If Irene got away, she would have a story to tell, not at all to their advantage. It would offend the emperor, it would infuriate Selim; it would make them both contemptible and ridiculous. Obviously this must not be. Pigneiro was of the same opinion. They must send away the Armenian woman. This had several times been talked of, and they were not

quite unprepared. They had a palki ready. They were in correspondence with a confidant of Selim, who promised to send ten horsemen as an escort. Benedict de Goes was instructed to go with three attendants. They engaged a sufficient number of bearers to travel by long stages.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A STRANGE VISITOR—MORE ABOUT AMEENA— THE FATE OF SHER AFGHAN.

OUR friend Stephen Ashbourne was much in need of the information confided to the reader in the last chapter. It is often amazing to us, looking back, how we escape noticing events which, when matured, have a decisive effect upon our fortunes, and this is even now going on with all of us. In the subtle mechanism of our own brains, impressions and proclivities are forming, to which we should pay more regard if we knew their further growth and what will come of them. In the strange complication of events which affected him so deeply, Ashbourne could have easily followed the clue, had some one put it into his hand, or had he come upon it by chance.

He had taken off his boots, drunk a cup of wine to revive himself, and was lying on a couch, thinking anxiously where he should turn his search, when a servant announced that a young man wished to see him. The newcomer was a well-dressed, slender young man, with a large pugarie on his head, under

which might be seen a long, handsome face of a Persian cast. After a profound salaam, the newcomer commenced somewhat abruptly :—

“It is known to me that you have preferred a complaint against the Prince Selim, who has injured you deeply, and that you have been asked by the emperor to prove what you have advanced.”

Ashbourne stared at his visitor, who went on :

“I have sought you, as I am able to help you.”

“That may be,” replied Ashbourne, looking curiously at the stranger, “but I do not know you.”

“Well, at least, if I am not your friend, I am an enemy of Selim. If you suffer wrong from a great man, do not trust too much to your friends, who are apt to fail you, or to take up your cause for form’s sake. Seek the enemies of your enemy, who will make your cause their own for their own sakes. And thus I am both willing and able to give you information about what you wish to know.”

“What do you know about my wrongs?” asked Ashbourne, somewhat struck by the cynical wisdom of his proffered ally.

“I know many things,” replied the young man. “I knew Irene, the Armenian damsel whom the emperor destined for you, and I have word what has become of her. I also knew the woman who was put in her place.”

“Then where is the real Irene?”

“She is now living within the walls of the church buildings of the Fathers of St. Paul.”

“How do you know that?” asked Ashbourne.

“I have this very day spoken with a woman who is a servant to the Christian sisters living there.”

“But what have the padres to do with the matter?” asked Ashbourne.

“I suppose they have kept her to please the Prince Selim, through whose wickedness the whole trick was done. She is there now, but may not be there long, for it being known that you complained to the emperor, and that the secret is out, they mean to send her quickly away to Allahabad. As for the other woman, she is already on the road to the same place. Pursuing her is not worth your while. Indeed, she is not so bad as you may think, for it was Selim who taught her this deceit.”

“What do you know of her?” asked Ashbourne.

“I know her and her history too,” replied his visitor.

“She was a Brahmini woman, who was married, when very young, to a great zamindar in Sirhind. He died suddenly. It is the custom of the Hindu women of high caste to be burned on their husband’s funeral pyre. From infancy their mothers tell them that it is praiseworthy for a woman to mingle her ashes with those of her husband, and the Brahmins persuade them that this will insure them spending thousands of years of happiness with their husbands in heaven; and sometimes several widows are willing to be burned at once. Though the emperor hates this cruel custom, he has not been able to forbid it entirely, as the Hindus are most obstinate in their devilish superstitions. Yet he

will not suffer that any woman should be burned unwillingly, and his governors have orders to rescue all such, and to take them out of the hands of their kindred, with whom they would not be safe. So this girl, by the persuasions of the Brahmins and her relations, and under the influence of camphor, or some maddening drug, was persuaded to go to the funeral pyre. She shrank back at the sight of the piled wood, but they hurried her in, put her husband's head on her lap, and set the pile on fire. She broke loose, when the priests tried with poles to thrust her back, in spite of her shrieks. Amongst the crowd around there were a number of Mahomedans, who protected her, and drove back the Hindus with the sword. But a woman who thus yields to the fear of death, and escapes at the last moment, can never again hope to live with the Hindus, who would regard her as a degraded outcast, who has dishonoured her own religion. So a young Ameer, who was present, carried her off, and took her to live with him, for she was young and very beautiful. He was a brave warrior; he was very fond of her. He was killed in the wars of Guzerat. After this she lived in Shaitanpurah, and used to act in plays and dances. Her name was Ameena. I have often seen and spoken with her. She was often in the seraglio, as the ladies were fond of her, for she was lively, clever, and very amusing, and good at acting any part. It was this that put it into the thoughts of Selim to get Ameena to play the part of Irene, whom she had often seen."

"But what about Irene?" asked Ashbourne.

“What do you wish to do with Irene? Will you claim her as your wife?”

“One thing is known to me already,” said Ashbourne.

“What is it then?”

“That you are not what you pretend to be.”

“What do I pretend to be?”

“Better to say what you are,” retorted Stephen; “you are a woman, and a very handsome one,” he added. “I am pleased that you should take so much interest in my affairs.”

The idea had entered his mind that this disguised lady might be the real Irene.

“I said that I would tell you after,” replied she, drawing herself up with stern dignity; “but since you have guessed so much, it is better that I should tell you all now. Did you ever hear of Ali Kuli, generally called Sher Afghan?”

“Yes, I have heard men speak of him as a great warrior,” answered Stephen.

“He was my husband. I am Mihrunisa, the unhappy wife of Sher Afghan, who was murdered by Selim. It is in the hopes of revenge that I have come here.”

“I did not hear of the death of Sher Afghan,” said Ashbourne.

“My father was a native of Teheran, who, being reduced to poverty, resolved to seek his fortune in India. In the extremest stress of misfortune, I was born on the way. Entering into the service of Akber,

my father and brother rose to high employment. With my mother, I often went to the seraglio to Rukayat Begum, where, in an unhappy hour, the Prince Selim first saw me. The emperor being told of his behaviour, I was quickly married to Ali Kuli. Selim then pretended to be friendly to my husband, to whom was given a jagir at Bardwan. I feared for his safety, for when the Mogul emperors want to get rid of their ameers, they sometimes send them to Bengal, for this fertile country is the seat of disease, and the mansion of death. Selim told the Subahdar Kutb-u-din, his foster-brother, to get rid of Sher Afghan. They tried to get up false accusations against him. At last the Subahdar sent word to Sher Afghan to come to meet him. We wished him to make an excuse, and the Subahdar sent his sister's son to persuade him that no harm would be done to him. Having no fear, Sher Afghan made ready to go to meet the Subahdar. His mother put on a helmet on his head, saying—"My son, make his mother cry before he makes your mother weep." We then kissed him and let him go. When he met Kutb he ordered his soldiers to set upon Sher Afghan; but ere they were ready, my husband sprang upon Kutb and gave him a deadly wound. Then they all rushed upon him. After giving many a death-dealing blow, he ascended to the heavenly mansions. Kutb-u-din, I know, is dead, and Ambah, who first struck my husband, also fell pierced by his sword. When the news of his death reached us, I resolved not to fall into the hands of the butcher, Selim. I fled from the

house, and escaped in disguise to Agra, to make complaint to the emperor. I left my mother and my little daughter behind. I have heard that they were all arrested, and the death of Kutb has been made the excuse for the murder of Sher Afghan. I have heard of the injury which Selim has done you, and of your boldness in accusing him. I wish also to do so. If all those whom he has wronged would join together, surely the emperor would open his understanding to his wickedness, and consent to send him to Gwalior.*

Ashbourne noticed that, while the lady told this affecting story, she remained quite collected, save a convulsive sob when she spoke of the death of Sher Afghan, and a gleam in her eye when she mentioned the two chiefs who had fallen by his sword. It was clear that in coming to him her object was to gain a weapon for her revenge against Selim. Needless to say, he was ready for any alliance of that kind. In a sympathetic and courteous manner, he asked the lady about Irene.

"I have known her for many years," answered Mihrunisa. "She is in the power of the padres, who will send her to Selim, if you do not do something to prevent it. I think I could see her, when perhaps I might get her to escape with me."

"Could we not give word to the emperor, who would order her to be set at liberty?" asked Stephen.

"Do not do so," said she earnestly. "They are all on the watch; they have spies laid everywhere. She

* Where was the state prison of India.

would be whisked away to some place ere the emperor's people could reach her. You must come suddenly upon them. Perhaps you could fall upon them on the way to Allahabad, and carry her off."

"I would like that better," answered Ashbourne, but then he began to reflect, Was this story true; and if true, did Irene want to be carried off? Then what would he make of her? I have got into trouble enough with espousing women I have never seen. Am I to do the same again?

The lady saw his irresolution, and either misinterpreted it, or affected to do so.

"There will not be many men with her," said she; "you can take enough of your white soldiers to overpower them; they will not be prepared for attack; there is little danger."

This imputation upon his courage decided Ashbourne. He promised that if Mihrunisa would give him word when Irene was being conveyed on the road to Allahabad, he would fall upon the party and rescue her. The lady promised to try to see her, when she would acquaint her with the real history of the deceit practised upon Ashbourne, and convey to her his promise to protect her in the future. Mihrunisa promised to send him further word, and then abruptly left him. He followed her to the door, when the disguised Persian lady seized the mane of her horse, which a boy had been holding, sprang to the saddle, and hurried off without losing a moment.

Of a truth, thought Stephen, the women of India are

not without mischief. One well-nigh kills me with a golden bullet; another gets me saved when Abul Fazl is slain; another counterfeits Irene to get me to marry her; and this woman who comes dressed like a man, who is she? Is this story true? or am I to be led into some new snare? She is handsomer than any woman I have seen, save peradventure in a picture, and proud and revengeful too. I have heard of Sher Afghan as the bravest warrior in the Moguls' army, and indeed she is a wife worthy of a soldier. I wonder when I shall again see her.

"What a queer woman," said a childish voice beside him, "and dressed like a man, and old too."

"Where have you been, Hasmat?" asked Ashbourne; "listening, no doubt."

"What else?" replied Hasmat, with the composure of a favourite. "Have you not had enough of these Hindustani women? They are all deceitful. Do not let them come here any more."

"But, Hasmat, you must give up this bad custom of listening."

Here Hasmat began to cry, saying she had a pain in her foot. Perhaps it had been stung. Ashbourne looked at the pretty little foot, no way deformed by shoes or boots, but could find no traces of injury.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SCHEME FOR THE CONVERSION OF INDIA—BENEDICT DE GOES AT HIS OLD TRADE—A STRANGE MEETING AND AN UNCEREMONIOUS PARTING.

IN the meantime Irene was so closely watched, and subjected to so many regulations, that she perceived she was no better than a prisoner in the mission-house. The old woman Sandal could not get near her. There was a difference of opinion between Pigneiro and Maria whether Irene should be told that they had resolved to send her to Allahabad, on the assumption that she had already given a promise tantamount to agreeing with their project, or whether another effort should be made to gain a more formal species of consent. Maria thought that the latter plan should be tried, though she admitted that they might fail. Irene was sure at least to ask for more time. As Maria had suspicions of Sandal, the old woman was kept out of the walls. She revenged herself by going to Mihrunisa and telling her that she suspected they were keeping her friend a prisoner, and were going to send her away, as they were hiring bearers for a long journey.

Mihrunisa told her to watch, and gave her another letter to take to Irene. There was a rumour about the affair amongst the native hangers-on of the mission. Not being able to give the letter directly to Irene, Sandal gave it to a sick woman in the hospital whom Irene used to visit. It was noticed by Sister Maria, who took it from her, and brought it to Francis Xavier. Though they did not entirely understand the meaning of the letter, it confirmed their fears.

“I wish we had never entered on this business,” said Jerome Xavier; “I never thought too favourably of it.”

“If we push through with it all may turn out well,” replied Pigneiro. “Let the young woman be sent away at once. In delay lies the danger. Benedict says he is willing to set off to-night.”

“But will the damsel consent to go?” asked Xavier.

“She has agreed already,” replied Pigneiro. “It is not wise to ask a woman’s consent twice. We ought quietly to arrange for her to leave, congratulate her on her good fortune, put her in the palki, and set her on the road. A messenger will go to Sheikh Hassan, who is much in the interest of the prince, to send a further escort. Soon will she be at Allahabad, when we must trust to the good religious principles we have already implanted in her mind. Would Sister Maria not go with her?”

“I do not think so; she is unwilling,” replied Pigneiro. “These women are not sufficiently obedient. Are you—are you still convinced of the wisdom of allowing them to be attached to our mission?”

“We shall leave the consideration of that question till we have settled the other,” replied Jerome Xavier, who knew Pigneiro’s dislike to the sisterhood. “In the meantime let everything be got ready. We shall write a letter to the prince, which Benedict will deliver.”

Although Irene had been got to receive the idea of being sent to Selim at Allahabad with resignation, the letter which had reached her had now worked a great change in her mind, and when it was announced to her by Maria that it was arranged that she should go that night she was seized with a fit of trembling.

“I do not wish to go, dear Maria; let me stay here. I shall help you at your work, or if this cannot be, open the door and let me go as I came. Surely I am not a prisoner or a slave.”

“But where would you go?” asked Maria.

“No matter,” replied Irene. “I do not wish to go to Allahabad. It was to escape this I sought refuge with you, and as you desert me I have still a friend.”

“Do not deceive yourself,” said Maria, “you might come to much harm rushing blindly into this wicked city. It behoves us at least to know where you would go. We take too much interest in your welfare to suffer you to run away.”

“But I have a friend,” said Irene faintly.

“Who is she then? Now tell me.”

“Mihrunisa, the wife of the great chief Sher Afghan, has returned to Agra.”

“Oh, how little you know, you innocent child,” replied Maria; “Sher Afghan met the death of a traitor for

having slain the Subahdar of Bengal ; his goods are forfeited, and Mihrunisa is herself a fugitive. How could she give you refuge ? Be sensible, Irene. You will yet be a great queen. Do not recoil against the fate which Heaven destines for you ; in your grandeur you will yet remember us for saving you from being a wretched fugitive. Let us dress you now, and you will see how you will become your new dress. We have carefully kept your jewels. Come now, you are not made for our dull life. Only do not forget us ; you must send for us when in your palace. We shall come to see you."

They coaxed Irene, and constrained her, till her power of opposition seemed gone. Only Theresa, who was younger and more tender than the two other sisters, could not keep from weeping, and supplicated that they might at least wait a few days till her terror or repugnance would pass away.

While they were making their preparations, Irene remained weeping in her room. Suddenly she heard a noise, and a stone was thrown in at the window, which was on the second storey. It was another letter from Mihrunisa, who had heard of the fate of the preceding one. "I know that they are taking you away, but means will yet be found to rescue you. You have still friends who are watching you."

In this there was little information, and for a moment she thought it might be some ruse to induce her to suffer herself to be carried away quietly. Her residence in the profess-house had not made her trustful of the Jesuits, but a little reflection dispelled the sus-

picion. She now determined to go quietly, in the hope that she might be rescued on the way. In her nature there was a dislike to engage in a struggle with those who surrounded her. Exhausted by the succession of painful emotions, wearied with fruitless ponderings over her strange fate, she waited the course of events, uncertain whither it would bear her. Under these feelings Irene suffered the preparations for her departure to go on, listened passively to the speeches and directions of the sisters, and quietly received their parting caresses. She laid herself down in the palanquin, even watching with a feeling of desperate levity all the little hubbub caused by her leaving. At last everything is ready. The bearers lift the palki and set off at a trot. It is still dark, but the figure of a horseman can be seen on each side of the litter by the backward glare of a torch. Benedict de Goes rode in front, wearing a native dress; a sword swung from his belt, and he had a shield on his bridle arm. In a short time the escort joins them, but only four men appear instead of the ten promised. The voice of one of the men sounded as if not unknown to her. The profess-house, with its strange inmates, was now left behind. To Irene it was the end of a disillusion. If the Jesuits had simply tried to make her devout, they might have succeeded, and then perhaps they might have directed her zeal whither they wished; but in trying to render her devout and ambitious, religious and worldly at once, they had brought two opposing currents against one another, which made an eddy in which her mind floated

free. By showing their protégée the interested character of their motives their kindness had lost its flavour. She now felt that she was thrust forth to undergo the fate which she had fled to avoid. "They care nought for my fate if their ends be reached. The arrow may like the quiver, but it cares neither for the bow nor the string that shoots it into the night. Why should my honour and happiness be sacrificed for their dreams?"

In the meantime the watchful Mihrunisa had sped away to Ahorapur and borne the news to Stephen Ashbourne. Her eager mien, her animated words, carried him off.

"That shall not be; they will not take her away against her will."

He got two of his English gunners, who were good riders, and two native horsemen on whom he could rely. These, with Mihrunisa and the lad, in reality her younger brother Ibrahim, made seven.

In the meantime the bewildered maiden fluttered between hope and fear. It will soon be seen, she said to herself, if I still have friends. Mihrunisa wrote that I should be rescued. If he will risk his life to save me I have still a friend. His wife I cannot be, but he may help me to some place of safety. Mihrunisa's husband is dead they say. With her I may live.

At the same time the bearers were trudging on at a swinging pace. Nothing could be heard but their brisk tread, and the dull fall of the hoofs of the horsemen marching beside the palki. Now and then the voice of the bearer in front warning the others of something to

take care of on the road. Her attention was deeply strained. At last her ear caught a sound from behind, at first faint, then lost, then clear at last, plainly the clank of horse-hoofs galloping towards the party. The horsemen talked to one another, and then the bearers quickened their paces. Still the clank came nearer. At last the palki was stopped, and set down at the side of the road, and the horsemen formed in front as if to allow the newcomers to pass. The moon was shining clearly; but the large trees at the side of the road cast deep shadows across it, so that the pursuers disappeared and reappeared again and again. At last they came near, then a clear voice cried out in good Hindi, with a foreign accent—

“Whom have you in that palki?”

“No business of yours,” was the reply.

“You are carrying away a lady against her will,” said Ashbourne.

“If you mean to use the road pass on or turn back. We cannot suffer you to challenge travellers in this way.”

“Ah, it is you, Benedict,” observed Stephen, who recognised the voice. “A nice errand for a religious brother, carrying away a lady.”

“The lady goes with her full consent,” replied Benedict, “and her brother is with her, who is her natural guardian.”

“If her brother be here,” shouted Stephen, “he must answer to me for his misdeeds. Let him come forward. Where is he?”

No answer.

"The lady was betrothed to me, and I must hear from her what her wishes are. So make way, Benedict, or——" with a flash of wrath, Stephen raised his sword.

"Stand firm," cried the Portuguese, for it seemed to him his men were inclined to give way.

"Set on," cried the Englishman, touching his horse lightly with the spur, and wheeling him rapidly on the left side of Benedict de Goes.

Since the day he had given up his unruly mount to Akber, Stephen had taken many a lesson in horsemanship, and almost as soon as he recognised that the combat had begun the unfortunate lay brother of the mission had his guard beaten down, and was lying on the ground with his turban cleft.

Ere Stephen could recover himself from the violence of his stroke, another horseman darted forward upon his flank, and raised a glittering scimitar to strike him, but ere it could descend, one of Ashbourne's band gave the newcomer a stab in the shoulder with a spear. This caused the new combatant to drop his sword, but his horse's flank bounded against Ashbourne's knee. They were thus so close together, that to rid himself of this second foe, Stephen struck him such a blow with the cross-hilt of his sword, that the man's saddle was clear of him in a moment. Not so the stirrups, one of which retained its hold on the foot of the unlucky rider. The horse at the same time, feeling itself free, bounded off, dragging the man with his head on the ground, and one leg in the air. The rest of the

escort seemed to abandon all thought of resistance. Those in the middle gave ground, and those on the sides fled. Two who saw no prospect of getting clear asked for quarter. The rest made off. As for the bearers, they had fled the moment they saw that swords were drawn. The ground was now clear, all obstacles swept away. The palanquin was seen standing by the side of the road, its polished surface and gildings reflecting the moonlight. Ashbourne gazed at it for a few moment, and drew a deep breath. In it was the maiden for whom he had hoped, suffered, dared so much. The door opened, and a figure issued from the palki. Ashbourne dismounted, and giving his horse to one of his men to hold, approached to see in the moonlight a face he had often dreamed about, but never seen; a face worthy of a Greek sculptor, but pale and anxious.

"Lady," he said, "I have come to rescue you. Do you accept of me as your deliverer?"

It was a few seconds before she answered "Yes." Then Mihrunisa, who was in male dress, stepped forward.

"It is I, your friend Mihrunisa. Come back with me to the city. We shall protect you."

A few hurried explanations were exchanged, the course of which were interrupted by the return of two horsemen, who had followed the fugitives to keep them from rallying. They reported that they had descried a large party of horsemen, who were coming towards Agra. "Perhaps it is a new escort," Mihrunisa said.

“We have accomplished our object, let us go.”

Ashbourne saw no reason why his party, inferior in number, should stay for these newcomers. But how could they take the lady with them; the bearers had all gone.

“Can you mount behind me, Irene?” said Mihrunisa.

“Yes, I do not fear,” she replied.

In half-a-minute the thing was arranged, and Stephen lifted Irene upon the horse, behind Mihrunisa, the rest following. Stephen looked round for his late adversary, Benedict de Goes. Not seeing him anywhere, he judged that he was not killed, but had managed to creep away. He heard the sound of coming hoofs, and the voices of men, so he rode on to join his party, who had gone on before. He judged that those approaching might be about a score, and that they were armed men. They seemed to stop for a while where the struggle had been, and rode on. Ashbourne’s party being well mounted, and only a few miles from Ahorapur, soon reached their quarters, but found neither Mihrunisa, Irene, nor the Afghan lad. No one could tell what had become of them, though all agreed that they had gone on before them. One of the men said that it was Mihrunisa who had wounded Ashbourne’s assailant with a spear. Stephen could not keep his thoughts from dwelling upon the beautiful Amazon who seemed to have so great an influence on his fortunes.

It seemed to Ashbourne that his career in India was

a proof of the overpowering force of outward events—Kismet, fate. With decided tastes and antipathies, anxious to choose his own condition, and to fly from what he disliked, he had nevertheless been hurried by one unforeseen event after another into a series of situations, few of which he would have selected. We get reconciled to the past because our existence is entwined in it. To wish our life to have been otherwise is like wishing that we had not been. In any case we draw from the past our memory and our experience. Ashbourne had now learned from it one lesson—the power of women to influence his life. In his disappointment he had once said that he would not drink the cup of love, but it had been brought so near his lips that he could not refuse to taste it. If the contents were dashed with bitterness, he at least knew how the bitter drops had fallen in, and how they might have been kept away. He had now arrived at the belief that more happiness could be attained in the society of a beloved woman than by anything else; that it was sweet to be beloved, and sweeter still to be lost in love. Why his happiness had fallen so much short, he now knew. If Ameena had been as pure and good as she was lively and beautiful, he might have been content with her. But she had come with the canker of deceit, a false imitation, for one more beautiful than herself, and winning, pure, and innocent withal. To the real Irene he was now attracted by the increased charm of difficulties, disappointments, sorrow, and trouble, coming from a common cause.

Thus he was able to say with a poet of his own time:—

“O benefit of ill ! now I find true
That better is by evil still made better ;
And ruined love when it is built anew,
Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN OLD FRIEND IN A NEW CHARACTER—THE INTERIOR
OF A ZENANA—A STRANGE PROPOSAL.

ASHBOURNE had not yet recovered from the exhaustion following his wound, and so when he got back to his quarters, wearied by the exertion and such unusual emotions, he very speedily fell asleep. In the meantime his diligent enemies, Sharif Beg and Gol Dass, hearing of the affray, hurried to Ahorapur, judging it a favourable moment to prosecute their desultory inquiries. Ashbourne's native secretary came to him with a story of alarm, that he missed some receipts and other important papers, and that the two munshis were artfully spreading reports against the Feringhi, accusing him and his men of dacoiting, and saying that they would soon be arrested. Ashbourne, losing all patience, directed Master Henry Ames to expel these worthies from Ahorapur, which command was executed with little ceremony, and no attention to the threats of the aggrieved functionaries.

About the same time a servant announced that a fakir desired to have speech of Ashbourne. Our friend,

not being in a charitable mood, replied that he would give him nothing. The servant again returned, saying that the fakir would not go away, and was sitting at the door.

“Well, he is likely to sit a while, and with little gain to himself,” observed Stephen, rising from his couch and looking around. To his surprise he perceived a tall, half-naked figure looking in at the window. In a flush of indignation Stephen ran to the door, under the impulse of laying rough hands on the intrusive fakir, who calmly turned to salute him with the customary “Ram, Ram.” A moment’s glance was enough ; it was his old friend, Ananda, the Brahmin of the cave, looking wilder, dustier, more unearthly, than when he had last seen him by his temple. Ashbourne’s faculty for being surprised had now apparently got exhausted, for he received Ananda with great composure, merely observing that it was an unexpected pleasure, and wondering in his own mind what he could make of his somewhat unpresentable visitor, who did not dress well—scarcely dressed at all, in fact, and had usages which might do well enough in his temple on the hill, but which were not likely to be appreciated at Agra. Nevertheless, like a true traveller, our friend did not lay too much stress upon mere appearances. He invited the Brahmin to enter, and his story was soon told. After Raj Singh, with his armed force, had met Ashbourne on the road, he sent a party with the Hindu guide straight to the temple in order to extract information about the whereabouts of Bir Singh, the

murderer of Abul Fazl. The Mahomedan soldiers used the feeble old gosain so roughly that he died, and Ananda himself was dragged before their commander, who, being a Hindu, had let the Brahmin go after cross-examining him at great length. His care of the old gosain being now over, Ananda did not feel inclined any longer to continue his ascetic life. He, therefore, left the temple, and made his way to Agra, living on alms. His first visit was to Ashbourne's quarters. Not only had Stephen an honest feeling of gratitude to Ananda for having preserved his life, but between these two men, so strangely brought together, a feeling of friendship already existed. In spite of the eccentricities of the Brahmin, the Englishman knew that his philosophical friend had latent abilities which might turn out of great value. So, with little time wasted in ceremony, the old familiarity between the two was resumed. In a few minutes Ananda was seated on the floor of Ashbourne's apartment, listening with sympathetic attention to the account of his wrongs, difficulties, and dangers. When Stephen had finished his story, the Brahmin gravely said—

“I thought you would have occasion for me. On this account have I come here. Leave this business about the munshis and your accounts to me. I shall spoil their design. The intelligence you want about the other matter will no doubt be easily found. You are now out of the jungle, and your road is straight. What I have prophesied of you will come to pass. In the meantime would you, in your gracious kindness,

give me some money to purchase clothes, as it is necessary for me to assume another appearance if I am to be of use to you."

"In truth," replied Ashbourne, "I should have sooner offered to repay you the money in the purse which you put in my hand when I left the cave."

"That money did not belong to me," said the Brahmin. "It was sent to me for your use by the Rajputin lady, the sister of Bir Singh." Ananda would only take two *aftabis*, gold pieces of the value of twelve rupees. In about two hours he returned, no longer an uncouth devotee, but a stately looking man, with a polite carriage, well dressed in native muslins, with a lace pugarie on his head. The Brahmin at once set to work about the inquiry concerning the accounts. After conferring with Ashbourne's secretary, he arrived at the opinion that the receipts and other papers had been stolen, probably by some one who knew where they were habitually kept. This must have been done either at the instigation of the two munshis, or in the hopes of selling the papers to them. The Brahmin caused the native attendants about the place to be ranked up in a line, and after scrutinising them keenly, told them all to go away. One of them he followed, and taking him a little aside, gravely accused him of the theft, which the man denied, though with some hesitation.

"It is known to me," said the Brahmin, in a calm and convinced voice, "that you took these papers, and that you have them concealed. It is also known to

me that your son is ill as a punishment for your theft. If you do not give them up, not only will you be punished, but your son will get worse and die.”

Now, the truth was that when the Brahmin had entered Ahorapur, in the primitive guise of a devotee, the man's wife had appealed to him for his intercession to get her son's illness removed. This attack on the man's superstitious fears threw him into such confusion that he ceased to deny that he knew where the papers were, and on a promise of impunity, and getting six golden pieces, gave them up to the Brahmin. This, he had already ascertained, was more than the two munshis would give, who thus, by their prolonged haggling, lost the chance of being masters of the situation. Ananda, on looking over the papers, now assured Ashbourne that he was in no danger of any further inquiry about his accounts. If the emperor were willing to give him a hearing, or to nominate some disinterested person, he was quite able to meet the munshis in any point. It was agreed that Ananda should act as Ashbourne's vakil or advocate, and he set himself to collect evidence about the deceit which had been concocted between the Prince Selim and Constantine, the Armenian. This he was able to do to some purpose, only he failed to make out what had become of Irene and Mihrunisa.

Two days after, Ashbourne received a summons to come to the presence of the emperor, and to bring the girl Hasmat along with him. He was to go to Kossipur. It was there Ashbourne had been at the religious discussion with the Jesuit priests. When Akber wished,

in some way or other, to dispense with the ceremonies of state, he was accustomed to make use of this house. Nevertheless, he always took his guards with him, and when he slept there they remained round the house.

Ashbourne took Ananda with him, stating that he wished to have him, as he could testify to where he had been during his illness, and expecting to derive advantage from his power of language. They were shown into the hall under the dome, and Hasmat was taken beyond the screen. In a short time the emperor entered the hall, with his secretary.

“Well,” said Akber gravely, “what is this you have done? I have been informed that you have fallen upon some travellers by the road, cut down one of the holy priests of St. Paul, and that a lady of whom he was in charge is missing. Where is she? What has become of her?”

Ashbourne replied that he did not know. In respect to the charges against him, the Brahmin would speak better than he could. It was he who had received him in the temple where the Bundela people brought him wounded.

“It is not the custom,” replied Akber, with a smile, “that the same man should act both as witness and advocate, but you are no longer under any suspicion in this matter.”

Nevertheless, he asked the Brahmin a good many questions about the murder of Abul Fazl. The Brahmin told him what he knew of the affair, spoke eloquently in praise of the fidelity of Ashbourne, and stated the

artifices of his enemies, who evidently wished to ruin a faithful servant by false representations.

The emperor then gravely said :—

“ Word has just come to me from my generals, Patr Das and Raj Singh. They have defeated Bir Singh, and besieged him in Irich. The murderer made his escape whenever a breach was made in the walls, but they are close upon his heels. The women of his household were taken, and sent to Agra, and his sister confirms the account which you and this Brahmin have given, namely, that you, being wounded, were spared after the battle, and that you were cared for by the Bundela people, as you had been generous to a lady taken captive at Ahmadnagar.

“ Besides, Lasker Khan, who with a few horsemen fought his way through the enemy, though badly wounded, has now returned to Agra. He reports that he saw you fighting with great bravery in defence of my friend Abul Fazl. It is evident that the suspicions against you were delusive.

“ As for the inquiry carried on at the direction of the accountant of the army, the report sent to me to-day seemed much too malicious, insinuating what it could not prove, and avoiding what might be said in your favour. This was not done with my knowledge, and I have ordered that the inquiry should stop.”

The emperor probably considered this apology enough. Great men in high places are scarcely ever so great that they will make a full admission of wrong. At the same time little men in high places will rather

persevere in injustice than confess to a mistake. But Ashbourne had felt the injustice too deeply to suffer it thus to be smoothed over.

“I have done,” he said, “my best in your majesty’s service. No doubt as long as you believed this you were ready to do me justice. If you have listened to accusations against me, now recognised as false, why should those who made them not be called to account? I hope your majesty will allow me to return to my own country. About the lady whom I rescued I cannot say where she now is, but unless she has again fallen into the hands of her persecutors, I doubt not your majesty has the power to make such search that she will be found, after which you may judge about the truth of the accusation which I made. I am still anxious to know her, and to give her what protection she may need. After this is settled, your majesty will allow me to make what arrangements seem fittest to return to my own land.”

“You are not yet content, Achburn-ji,” replied the monarch with a smile, “and indeed it is difficult to make any one so. Come with me.” The emperor raised the screen, and entered into the apartment, signing to Ashbourne to follow. The screen was then dropped. To his amazement he found himself in presence of four ladies, splendidly dressed, of surpassing beauty. Behind one of them stood two children, and little Hasmat. “I have heard you say that in your country the intercourse is more free than is the custom in India. I have especially to present you to the

Begum Gulrookh,* who is much interested in your fortunes, and to whom you may yet have an opportunity of doing a service. It has already been your lot to make some acquaintance with these other ladies, so you may see whether you can now recognise them."

Ashbourne looked attentively at the ladies. The first he recognised was the stately figure of Mihrunisa, now in female dress, looking, he thought, somewhat distant and cold. The second had a Hindu face, darker in complexion, timid and shrinking, but with a grace of its own. He had seen something like it, but where he could not recall. About the third, who kept behind the others, he was not long doubtful; it was the face he had seen in the moonlight, the pale, pure face with black, well-marked eyebrows and bright eyes, which met his glance for a moment and then looked down, Irene the Armenian maiden. It does not seem to me that any word-painting can make the reader have into his mind the picture of a beautiful woman. The group might be the subject of a painting—the tall and handsome Circassian, the haughty face and fine figure of Mihrunisa, the softer grace of the Rajputin, the sister of Bir Singh, now for the second time a captive, and the fine intelligent face and matchless form of Irene, each beautiful, yet each of a distinct type. Add, good painter, the noble figure of Akber, and our friend Stephen Ashbourne, looking not yet at his ease amongst this strange group of Orientals. After the first confusion of introductions and greet-

* Gulrhookh literally means rose cheeks.

ing was over, the emperor, addressing our friend, said :—

“It is not without a good reason that I have sent for you, and presented you to these ladies, and now I shall tell you what is in my mind. You have proved yourself a man worthy of trust. It is my hope that my life may last so that these children may grow up in safety. But the life of man is like the shadow of a cloud ; it is here for a moment and then away. Flatterers have told me that it is my destiny to have more than the ordinary length of the life of man, as the cycle of Saturn is returning in which the original longevity of mankind is restored. But it is likely that this is only said to please me. I already feel that my strength has become less, and as is the strength of man, so is his life. I may any day pass away from this transitory world, so I would fain promise a refuge for those whom my memory may not protect.

“In India the sons of kings are born enemies, ready to shed one another’s blood, or to desolate the country with civil war. I do not wish that this great empire should be made a field of battle for my sons, nor can I safely commit a boy of tender years to his brother’s keeping. For this reason it has often been in my thoughts to provide a retreat where these children and their mother might be safe after my departure. In the great mountains which cover India to the north the air is colder, and the hillsides are always green and beautiful. Deep in the Himalayas there is a valley of a size unusual in these steep hills ; it is well-watered

and extremely fertile; it is only reached by crossing high mountain passes; and with a little watchfulness and military skill it can be rendered safe both from the inroads of the mountaineers and any invasion from the plains of India. By an arrangement with a mountain rajah you will be put in peaceful possession, for to this valley I would wish you to go to found a state which perhaps in time will be prosperous and powerful. What aid in men and money you need you will have from me. You yourself will be regent, and will have full powers to make what arrangements you please. It is known to me that you have some singular notions, drawn from your own country and the books of philosophers; but you have enough of sense to correct such ideas by practice, or at least you will be cautious in applying them. What I ask you is the solemn promise, that when called upon, you will receive these children and their mother, and train up the boy to reign after you in wisdom and virtue. In this valley you will find the cool climate which you miss in India, and no doubt some of your countrymen will be glad to accompany you to escape the oppressive heat, nor will you in these great mountains be shut out from the plains, for as long as I live I would have you to visit me during the cold season, to keep in order my force of artillery."

Ashbourne was not sure at first whether he understood this extraordinary offer. He saw at once that one motive at least was his irreconcilable enmity to Selim. It was clear that Akber, while he dreaded the

prince as a successor, yet feared the confusion and warfare which would arise if he nominated any one else, and hesitated to take decisive steps to exclude him. The proposal was really inspired by the remark of the Begum Gulrookh, that her son would be better in a village of her native Caucasus than anywhere in India. That Stephen Ashbourne should be called to found a state amongst those stupendous mountains, whose snow-white tops he had seen above a hundred miles off, and that he should be able to carry out his own ideas of government and justice, seemed too wonderful for a dream.

“I hope,” he said, “that your majesty will permit me to consider this matter and to consult some friend. In the meantime your majesty cannot be ignorant of the deceit practised on me and this young lady, since I find her in your presence.”

“Yes. I have heard the whole story from her and Mihrunisa. I am deeply grieved at the base conduct of my son. I am willing to make you amends. Leave it to me to do you justice. In the meantime wait on the emperor. Your request that you should consider my proposal is not without reason. You entered into my service freely, and if you undertake this commission let it be of your own choice. Word has just come that two ships from your own country have arrived at Surat with a view of opening trade, and should you desire it you can avail yourself of them to return to your native land. But it is my hope that you will still remain in India, and that

I may be able to requite you for the wrongs you have suffered."

It might have been thought that this sudden opening of a way to return to his own country would have turned Ashbourne away from the emperor's proposal. In reality it did the reverse; the idea of returning to England to resume a commonplace life there, was distasteful to him. He repeated his request to be allowed to consult with his friends whether the commission was one which he could undertake.

"The matter," replied Akber, "is one which cannot be much talked about. It will be necessary that your friends be discreet persons."

Ashbourne said that he would like to ask the advice of Hakim Ali and the Brahmin Ananda.

"You may consult the Hakim," replied Akber, "we have faith in his wisdom and secrecy; but this strange Brahmin, why should you ask his advice? You say he was lately a devotee in a Hindu temple."

"Your majesty may have a difficulty in believing, but this man, who is a great astrologer, prophesied that I should yet have a state to rule, and that he should be my minister, which I agreed to in jest, for I never thought such a prediction could be fulfilled."

Akber started, for, in spite of his free-thinking, he had a vein of superstition in his character. He asked to know more about the Brahmin, and Ashbourne repeated what he could recollect of his story, when the emperor walked into the hall, and was soon engaged in conversation with Ananda.

Stephen thus found himself left with the ladies, when the begum addressed him. "I already know your story," said she. "Anxious that the emperor should know at once the true story of the lady whom you rescued, Mihrunisa brought her to my house. Perhaps we ought sooner to have given you word where they were. I have heard from these ladies your adventures, and the unworthy deceit practised upon you, which will now be repaired. The emperor in his grace and generosity will make you amends for what you have suffered, and in the society of this young lady you will know how precious a jewel is the heart of a good woman."

Here Stephen's glance fell on Irene, who made some remark which he could not follow, in deprecation of the downright speech of the begum.

"I understand," she went on, "that you Christians desire to be acquainted with one another before marriage. This, though not agreeable to custom in India, seems to me to be founded on good sense, and in your case much confusion has arisen from you not knowing one another. I shall provide that you will converse with Irene, and between knowing her and loving her there is but a small step. One thing I hope you will grant, that we may keep Hasmat with us for some days. Her talk amuses us much, and we shall treat her kindly."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AGAIN IN THE SUNSHINE—AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW.

WHATEVER rumours of the extreme condescension of the emperor may have got into vogue, Ashbourne soon perceived that his popularity amongst the courtiers had returned. All his old friends came to salute him, and his enemies would willingly have become friends. Stephen, however, had learned that his whole fortune depended upon the good-will of the reigning prince, and even that his own safety would be in danger if the emperor died suddenly. Akber was no doubt much irritated against Selim, and talked of altering the succession for one of his grandsons, and shifting his formidable son from Allahabad to Guzerat,* but he seemed unwilling to close his mind against him, and Hakim Ali assured Ashbourne that he feared this temporising would end in his forgiving Selim's offences, or yielding to his plausible denials and excuses.

The Hakim strongly advised his friend to accept the government of the Himalayan valley, which was called Lattiana. He pointed out that Ashbourne's health was impaired by his wounds and the subsequent strain he had endured, and that a cooler climate was advisable

* This latter project was carried out afterwards.

to restore him to his old vigour. Stephen did not wish to return in poverty to England. What money he had saved had been spent by the luxurious Ameena. Ashbourne was somewhat perplexed about the character of his connection with her. Should it be treated as a regular ceremony which should be formally annulled? Ameena herself threw no difficulties in the way. Shortly after reaching Allahabad that irrepressible lady contracted a new liaison with a Mussulman commander of horse, whom she soon persuaded to marry her. He died several years after, leaving Ameena a rich widow. She built a magnificent tomb to his memory, and lived in a house not far off. She professed to be a zealous Mahomedan, learned to read the Koran, and became famous for her charities.

Stephen and Irene had been brought near each other by the force of events. Disturbing causes had separated them for a time, and again brought them together. To those who knew the romantic chain of their adventures, it seemed clear that they were fated for one another. In some minds there is a kind of reaction against the too apparent despotism of fate. They like to feel that their own will has not been quite passive. So Stephen thought that he would, or could, calmly consider what course of life was best. But any course save one seemed distasteful. It is only when one turns against the stream that he learns its strength. Stephen found that a passionate longing to become the life-long protector of the lovely maiden filled his breast. Without her, life would be dark and cheerless.

Moreover, the proposal of Akber that he should take the government of Lattiana was too great a temptation for his ambition and desire for an outlet for his energies. It is true that Stephen had learned and unlearned many things since he used to read More's "Utopia," but there still remained in his mind a craving for a better state of things, and a belief that by a juster arrangement of laws and government many evils might be relieved or cured. He had faith enough to try the experiment. These were the days of a great awakening in men's minds, and an enthusiasm which the course of time has weakened, though it is not yet dead.

The Begum Gulrookh had promised that he should be allowed to see Irene agreeably to European manners, and he sent a message desiring that privilege. For answer he got word that she was ill, had ague. Hasmat came back, having stayed a few days with the ladies at Kossipur. She said that they were very kind to her, had asked about her coming into Ashbourne's hands, and Kistna, who had remained with the begum, made out that she, Hasmat, was really the daughter of Furhad Khan, the general of the army which had besieged Choul. The begum had asked her many questions about Ameena, but Irene seemed to be distressed when the matter was spoken about.

Irene was ill at ease with more troubles than ague. The conversation of Maria and the sisters in the mission-house had introduced a flood of new ideas into her mind. Subsequent events had begotten perplexity and distrust of herself as well as of others. She was

nervous, anxious, full of fears. If Ashbourne had exerted himself to rescue her, was it not owing rather to feelings of revenge against Selim than for any love he could bear her? And then his connection with Ameena! What must have been his tastes that he could be content to live with such a woman? That Ameena could ever have resembled herself, even in report, she of course viewed as preposterous, forgetting after all that Stephen had agreed to marry her without really knowing much about her, and that a worse disillusion was at least conceivable.

So Ashbourne had some difficulty in arranging an interview with Irene, and when they did meet he thought her very nervous and constrained.

"I hoped to have had a kinder reception," he said; "I asked to see you to learn from your lips whether I might yet be happy."

"With me," she replied, "I fear you would not attain happiness. Had you not rather take longer time to consider. It is not so long since——" here she checked herself.

"I have had too many disappointments already. I weary to have you at last," replied Stephen; "I feel lonely and desolate."

"You will get over it," she replied; "you will find some one else to console you."

"But my heart desires none but you," he said, passionately; "who else would I seek?"

"How do I know?" answered she, quickly. Then after a pause, "What do you say to Mührunisa, and there is Kistna. They have both a great admiration for

you. With Mihrunisa you have already had some intercourse. She is a widow, and might be induced in time to share your new kingdom with you. She is worth trying for. She is indeed the sun of women,* fit to be a queen."

"What is that to me?" said Stephen, somewhat impatiently. "If I had conversations with her, they were all about you."

"Perhaps; but you did see her, and seeing her you would needs admire her. Do not deny it. I know better; I noticed how you glanced at her." Here a smile stole over Irene's face.

"No doubt Mihrunisa is beautiful, but love is in your eyes and not in hers, at least to me. I love you, and no one else can make me happy. Do not resist any more. Fate is too strong for us. It has brought us together and will yet unite us, say what you may."

She looked down and gave no answer, and then looked up for a moment.

"It will be," he said. All was understood.

The emperor did much to make amends to Ashbourne for what he had endured. He doubled the *tabeen* before allowed for Irene, the draft of which had never been presented to the treasury. The ladies of the seraglio heaped presents upon her. The wedding took place about two months after. It was as formal as could have been desired, but more after the European than the Oriental fashion. The ceremony was performed by an Armenian priest who had newly come to Agra.

* This is the literal meaning of the word Mihrunisa.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONSTITUTION MAKING—THE JOURNEY TO THE VALLEY OF LATTIANA, AND HOW THEY FARED THERE.

ASHBOURNE had many discussions with Hakim Ali, Ananda, and others about framing a constitution for the new state. Though the Hakim had no design of accompanying them, he had no hesitation in proposing laws which would have been better for philosophers than for ordinary mortals. He had evidently some doubts about the sanity of Ananda, but apart from religious matters, that personage showed much sense and shrewdness, and as the people in Lattiana were Hindus, Ashbourne judged that the Brahmin might have much influence with them. Akber recommended that "the Divine faith," should be introduced, but Ashbourne would not accept it for himself, and Ananda had his own ideas on religious reforms. All religions were to be tolerated. They determined to regulate the amount of land held by each owner, and allowed stated rights of wood and pasturage. A portion of the produce was stored in public magazines for seasons of dearth or private mis-

fortune. All were expected to do some work; and employment, if possible, found for each; but idlers were allowed to choose between forced labour and expulsion from the state. Thirty chiefs of families united to elect a headman. These headmen met to present a list of men of good report, from which the regent should select a council of ten, who should have power to make laws. The regent himself added five. He held himself the right of nominating judges and had the management of all external affairs. Every male was to be trained to arms, beginning at the age of fourteen, and they were called out to exercise at stated periods. Such were some of the provisions of the proposed constitution, though Ashbourne, not unmindful of objections, determined to wait till he had been some time in Lattiana, and seen the character of the people of the hills, before he should attempt to carry it out, or modify his scheme.

No attempt was made to reach the valley till spring, for during the cold season the passes were blocked with snow. Thus he had several months to make preparations. Thirteen of the old crew of the *Unicorn* agreed to accompany Stephen and share his fortunes. The rest were to stay behind at Ahorapur under the command of Henry Ames, save three or four who, at their own desire, were sent to Surat to take ship to England. He engaged a number of artisans and men who practised useful trades to go with him. The applications were numerous, especially from Afghans, Persians, and Circassians, who were used to mountain life, and were

weary of the hot plains of India. When the spring began to return Ashbourne joined his encampment, and made ready to move. He took with him about three hundred people. The emperor was most liberal in furnishing the equipment and carriage. He supplied camels and elephants to carry everything they needed from Agra to the hills, where camels were useless.

A splendid elephant was given to bear Irene, and the ladies of the seraglio presented her with a beautiful cashmere tent lined with silk, which was not too bulky to be borne across the hills. She was accompanied by Kistna the Rajputin, who was now a widow.

Mihrunisa would have been easily induced to go too ; but as Irene confided to the gentle Rajputin, Mihrunisa is very clever and very beautiful and I love her much. If my husband had wished to marry her he might have asked her, but as he has chosen me instead I do not wish that he should repent. Mihrunisa is made to rule wherever she stays, and few men could resist her if she sought to attract them.

It cost them a fortnight's marching before Ashbourne and his company with all their attendants and baggage reached the foot of the Himalayas. They had now to send away their camels and elephants, and trust to the numerous porters assembled to carry their effects over the mountain ridges between them and the destined valley. They had also a few mules. At the foot of the hills the heat was overpowering, so that the exertion of ascending was very burdensome, the hills being steeper than the Englishmen had ever conceived ; but

they soon got into cooler flights of air. The bamboo and the banana disappeared for the oak, the holly, and the pine, and a few hours' ascent brought them to the summit of a hill about 7000 feet high, where there was sufficient ground for them to pitch their tents beside a little lake, from which, in the winter time, supplies of ice were sent down to Agra, to be stored there for the use of the Court. Here they stopped several days, sending out porters in advance with the necessary stores. The Englishmen were delighted to feel the cool air fill their chests, and to see familiar flowers reappear, the St. John's wort, the thyme, the violet, the wild strawberry, the barberry, and other species which reminded them of the woods of their own country. On the southern side of the mountain were seen extended the plains of India, with dark spots here and there, marking groves and forests; each river and lake was lighted up by the golden rays of the setting sun. On the other side the eye wandered amongst a thousand hills till it rested upon the snowy range. As the long shadows passed away, and night descended upon the giant hills, the stars looked twice as big as they had done below. The landscape filled the mind with awe by its austere beauty and sombre grandeur. When they resumed their march they took with them one elephant to carry Irene, Kistna, and Hasmat. They might have taken more of these useful animals had they been sure of finding food for them.

At the beginning of each march they sent men on to look for places on which to pitch their tents, for the

mountains were so frightfully steep that it was often difficult to get a few yards of level ground upon the hill-side. Afar off their gaze would rest upon what seemed a valley with groves and fields, but when they reached it they found it half-full of disjointed masses of rock, and every little shelf of ground occupied by the rice or corn crops of the industrious mountaineer. These enormous hills were not desolate; there were people everywhere, grazing their sheep or goats up to the snow-line, or cultivating their little fields on the edges of the precipices. It was ten days before they reached the valley of Lattiana. Their last march was through a pass about 10,000 feet high, where the snow still lingered under the great deodars, although the rhododendrons were in full bloom. The natives examined the snow with the greatest attention, till the Englishmen began to make snowballs and throw them at them, which induced them to hurry on. In a little time they gained the other side of the pass, when the longed-for valley came in sight. It was about eleven miles long and two broad, bounded on each side by hills of moderate height, decked with trees. On the shoulders of these hills were some smaller valleys or table-lands; and behind these again rose higher mountain-peaks, which opened here and there to show the *barafan*, the summits of eternal snow, inexpressibly clear and brilliant in the rays of the sun. Numerous streams and waterfalls descended from the hills to join a large and rapid river which flowed through the middle of the valley. Apparently it had once been a

lake, the overflow of which had gradually worn a bed through the rocky barrier at its lower extremity, by which the river now sought the plains of India, between two precipices which looked like the portals of some enormous gateway.

They found that a fierce tribe of mountaineers from the north-east had broken into Lattiana, and massacred or carried off most of the population. This partly explained the willingness of the Hindu rajah to make it over to Akber for a sum of money. Ashbourne's first care was to guard against a surprise from these enemies, who would have been too ready to plunder the treasures he brought with him.

He placed a guard in the pass by which they sought entry, and, as his men were armed with good matchlocks, and he had some light pieces of cannon, he considered that they would be able to hold their own against any inroad of the hill-tribes, who were but poorly armed, and had a superstitious terror of artillery.

The fear of this marauding tribe had one good result, that it helped to hold Ashbourne's people together by the sentiment of common danger, and to enhance in their eyes the value of their new possession; for there is nothing better calculated to make men value a thing than the necessity of having to fight for it. The remaining inhabitants also looked upon the newcomers as protectors, and were pleased at the wealth which they brought with them. Stalwart hill-men came from all sides to labour at the works which

Ashbourne planned, and which kept him busy for years. He built houses for his people in Lattiana and the smaller valleys around, and constructed a bridge across the river. For himself and his European companions, he got houses built on the shoulder of a hill about a thousand feet above Lattiana, as they preferred the cooler air of the heights. Channels were made for the streams which descended from the mountains, so that they might irrigate the little fields, which sank in a succession of natural terraces till they reached the more level ground on the banks of the river.

Needless to say, these works could not have been carried on without the support and wealth of Akber, whose interest in the undertaking was so great that he talked of visiting the new settlement himself.

This picturesque retreat in the Himalayas seemed to Irene's ardent and poetic mind the beginning of a new being, which revived the ancestral longings for mountain life. To one who had sickened at the restraints of the mahal and the narrow life of the Jesuit mission-house, the freedom of the mountain-side was like the opening of the cage and the skyward flight to the captive lark. The fresh, cool air gave a roseate glow to her pale cheeks, and quickened the pulses of her young heart. The song of the birds, the note of the cuckoo, the voice of the partridge, awakened strange flutterings of pleasure in her breast. Her step soon became surer, fleet, and lighter. She gathered the flowers of the mountain side, and followed

with delight the winged flowers, the gorgeous butterflies of the Himalayas. Hasmat also enjoyed to the full the novelty of her new condition, and it was difficult to keep her under what was thought due restraint. She would seek to imitate and do everything, to milk the cows, ride the mules or horses, run into the thickets to watch the antics of the monkeys, and even asked Stephen to take her with him to see a bear-hunt.

Though their first dwellings were rude, the valley seemed to Irene a paradise complete in itself. The fields gave corn, rice, and flax; on the slopes there were apple and pear-trees, vines, apricots, plums, walnuts, and other kinds of fruit-trees; melons, beets, radishes, and many other vegetables, were plentiful. They had abundant pasture for sheep and goats, and the hillwomen cut grass for their cows in the clefts of the rocks. Bees collected their stores of honey from the flowers that grew so luxuriously on the slopes and crags. The hills abounded with game, and the rivers were full of fish. They introduced the weaving of shawls and scarves, to have some work for the people during the winter. Some of the tasteful patterns, originally devised by Irene, still exist in the shawls of Rampur. She tried to help her husband in all his aims, and soon learned to speak and read English. In one another's society they found the love for which their hearts had long yearned. After so many disappointments they had a home, in which the time passed away but too quickly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TELLS SOMETHING MORE OF THE FORTUNES OF THE
PERSONS IN THIS BOOK.

THE first winter Ashbourne did not think it prudent to leave the new settlement, but during the cold season of the next year, he, along with Irene, visited the plains, and lived three months at Ahorapur, to superintend the training of Akber's artillery. They would have gone back the next cold season, but ere the time came to set out, the news reached them of the death of the great emperor. Soon after, Gulrookh, her son, and daughter, and a few attendants, appeared, to claim the retreat provided for them. Stephen had ready for the begum a handsome pile of buildings, which rose tier above tier, like the houses in her native Caucasus. The young Kalil inherited more of his father's great bodily vigour and activity than his surpassing mental power. He was of a happy and amiable disposition, and liked the free life of the hills. As he got older, the bright wit and merry laugh of Hasmat gained his heart, and with the consent of his mother and Ashbourne they were married.

In his favourite rôle of reformer and legislator, the worst practice which Stephen had to contend against was female infanticide amongst the Rajputs. In his attempts to introduce a better state of things, he was powerfully assisted by Ananda, who, like many reformers in Hinduism, advocated a purer creed, the introduction of monotheism, and the abolition of the restrictions of caste. In this the eloquent Brahmin had a wonderful success amongst the hillmen.

In truth, the adventures of our friend were by no means over when he commenced the government of Lattiana; but to relate what he did, and how he formed and extended the state, and what befell his companions, and how he visited England and returned again to spend his last days in the Himalayas, and what came of his descendants, would require more time to record than we can venture to claim from our readers. In the valley of Lattiana may still be seen the remains of the buildings he erected, and the irrigation works he undertook. The tradition of his name and deeds has passed into the regions of mythical exaggeration in the district around the valley where he dwelt, the first Englishman that bore rule in the Himalayas.

Before closing, we must give a short account of the further history of some of the personages connected with the story. Let us first turn back to the Jesuit missionaries. The attempt to carry Irene away to Allahabad, the rescue on the road, and the overthrow of the brother of the mission, with many accessory details, very soon became the property of the bazaars in Agra.

A score of versions of the story went about, most of them much to the discredit of the Fathers of St. Paul. The consternation of these worthies was great when, some hours after, the palanquin in which Irene had been borne away was brought back to the mission-house, and on Father Jerome and Father Pigneiro issuing out they found it contained, not the Armenian damsel, but Benedict de Goes, with a scalp wound on his head, and his native finery soiled with blood and dust. They had many a consultation what to do and say, to put the best gloss upon their unlucky intrigue.

It would appear that Irene, in informing the emperor of what had taken place during her residence in the mission-house, must have been lenient in her report of their designs, for although the Fathers fell into disgrace for some time, they were still allowed to continue in Agra. But it was not thought fit that Benedict should reside there longer, and whenever his wound was healed, Jerome Xavier had a mission for him. Reports had reached them, from different quarters, of a country in Central Asia, in which the religious rites much resembled those of the Catholic Church. They had large monasteries for monks and nuns. They had celibate shaven priests, and prayers were uttered in a dead language. In their churches they used bells and rosaries, and burned incense. They believed in one God, a miraculous conception, hell, purgatory, heaven—common features of Catholicism and Buddhism, whose superficial resemblance was brought closer by the fancies of ignorant travellers.

Jerome Xavier determined to send a messenger to this king to ascertain if his religion was not a corrupted form of Christianity, and to try to bring the prince and his people within the pale of the Catholic faith. So Benedict de Goes was sent on to Lahore to await a caravan which should set off for China by Yarkand. In native dress, and armed with sword and bow and quiver, the versatile Portuguese made his way through Tibet and China, and at last joined the Jesuit missionary, Adam Ricci, at Peking.

Jerome Xavier remained at Agra till 1617, when he returned to Goa. King Philip III. of Spain intended to make him Archbishop of Anguemala, but he died before he could enjoy that dignity.

We find Father Pigneiro at Surat, in 1608, for Captain Hawkins denounces him for offering a Mogul grandee 40,000 rials of eight to get him (Hawkins) killed. This led to an attempt to get the English captain poisoned.

It was Constantine, the Armenian, who had been thrown from his horse in the affray between Ashbourne and Benedict de Goes. He was dragged along for some distance by the stirrup. The comeliness of his face was sadly marred, and one of his ears was almost rubbed off. He was borne to the nearest serai, where he lay ill for some weeks. After that, he went to Allahabad; from Selim he met with a very cool reception. In the end, he became a merchant, in the Portuguese port of Hoogley.

The Jesuit mission remained at Agra during the

reigns of Akber's successors, Jehangir and Shah Jehan. They long retained sanguine hopes of making a convert of the former prince, but this was never realised. In fact, he seemed to have been destitute of all religious faith.

Selim succeeded his father, and reigned under the title of Jehangir. It is not surprising, after all he had done to offend his father, that Akber should have thought of passing him over for one of his sons, but probably the fear of an unnatural civil war prevented Akber ever carrying out this design. The accounts of what took place within the palace during the last illness of that great prince, have been furnished by Jehangir himself. The ordinary story is that the emperor was so much shocked at an unseemly quarrel between Selim and his sons, Khusrau and Kharram, during an elephant fight, that he fell ill of a disorder, which Hakim Ali failed to cure. Jehangir, who bore no love to the Hakim, asserted that he killed his father by bringing on a new complication with his medicines.

Whenever Akber's death was known, Bir Singh emerged from his hiding-places, and boldly presented himself at the court of Jehangir. He was made commander of three thousand, and put in possession of the territory round Orcha. Jehangir, in his *Memoirs*, which, for selfish frankness, are worth reading, openly confesses that he had instigated Bir Singh to waylay Abul Fazl and kill him, under promise of a rich reward. He justifies himself by saying that it was Abul Fazl

who taught his father to disbelieve in the divine mission of Mahomet.

The most striking event in the reign of Jehangir was his connection with one of the characters in our story. Mihrunisa had gone to live with Rukayat Begum, repulsing, for years, all the advances of Selim, even after he became emperor. But ambition, in the end, prevailed over indignation or revenge, and she at last consented to become the wife of Jehangir, taking, at the same time, the title of Nurjehan, by which she is known in history.

Though she was thirty-four years old before she married Jehangir, a time of life when women in India have generally lost much of their charms, her influence over the emperor was unbounded. She reclaimed him, in great measure, from his habits of intemperance in wine, and in many ways softened the natural ferocity of his temper. "Before I married her," writes Jehangir in his Memoirs, "I never knew what marriage really meant. I have conferred the duties of government upon her." She was celebrated for magnificence in adorning apartments, and for taste in dress, and is said to have invented attar of roses. Her father became prime minister. Her daughter, by Sher Afghan, also called Mihrunisa, was married to Shahriar, a son of Jehangir, whom she tried to place on the throne of India. Her niece was the beloved wife of Shah Jehan, to whose memory that magnificent monarch erected the famous Taj Mehal, at Agra. We have no room for further details of Nurjehan's unquiet life. On the

banks of the Ravi, a few miles from Lahore, there is an imposing monument, with a flat roof, covering a wide space of ground. Four passages, adorned with mosaics, converge to the central chamber of the pile, where, under a white marble tombstone, rest the bodies of Jehangir and Nurjehan.

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OPINIONS OF THE PRESS—*continued.*

he leaves to the followers of the seer to make good. The second Dr. Ireland supports by citation of the acknowledged events of Swedenborg's life, and of the internal evidence of his works."—*Scotsman*, 21st October, 1889.

"Popular works bearing on mental disease are neither so numerous nor so well done that we can afford less than a hearty welcome to a fresh volume from the pen of Dr. William W. Ireland. His well-known 'Blot upon the Brain,' with its original and ingenious speculations and great historic interest, opened new ground four years ago, and was at once recognised as a piece of solid and valuable as well as attractive work. Dr. Ireland is fortunate in the choice of catching titles, his earlier success is now followed by a collection of historical and psychological studies, gathered under the suggestive name of 'Through the Ivory Gate.' Properly, the book may be described as a sort of historical appendix to the 'Blot upon the Brain;' it has less of theory, less of physiology, and more of narrative, although the bearing of heredity on mental disease is not lost sight of. As indicating the scope of the work we may say that the persons treated of are—Swedenborg; Blake, the engraver; King Louis II. of Bavaria; Guiteau, the assassin of Garfield; Louis Riel; the Jesuit Malagrida; Theodore of Abyssinia; and King Theebaw. Some of these papers display considerable research, and all are written in the easy graphic style that made Dr. Ireland's earlier book so popular. Bearing on a subject of such general interest, the volume may be trusted to find appreciative readers not only among professional men, but also among intelligent people of every class."—*The Scottish Leader*, 14th November, 1889.

"We cannot reproduce or boil down the excellence of the author's style, the methodical arrangement of his matter, the historical thoroughness, and the philosophic breadth of his conception of Swedenborg in his stages of mental development, maturity, and decay. One must read the book to see how thoroughly Dr. Ireland knows his subject, and how dispassionately he pieces it out and weighs all sides. Not less interesting to some readers will be the other chapters on historical personages coming nearer our own times, men who have figured in recent history, and either been adjudged insane or had their sanity doubted. The work altogether is a worthy record of its kind, a fitting sequel to the 'Blot on the Brain,' a careful, masterly work, and a tribute to Dr. Ireland's scientific eminence and philosophical culture."—*Glasgow Herald*, 16th November, 1889.

"We gain nothing by charging with insanity harmless visionaries who 'see an angel' where we are only conscious of a happy inspiration, and who 'talk with God' where an ordinary mortal is merely impressed with a great idea. It is very much a matter of expression which partakes of the poetical on the one side and of the matter of fact on the other.

"Though we have found fault with Dr. Ireland as the exponent in these instances of an extreme view, we gladly admit that he tells his stories in an interesting way, and with much of what he says of Charles Guiteau, Louis Riel, and Kings Theodore and Theebaw we find no difficulty in agreeing. His book, though likely to raise controversy, is well worth reading."—*British Medical Journal*, 23rd November, 1889.

"To place him (Swedenborg) in a work with such a title, means, without further debate, that his dreams have not been fulfilled. It is, in short, boldly throwing down the gauntlet, and challenging those who still retain faith in the prophetic foresight of Emanuel Swedenborg. We shall see whether it is picked up by any worthy antagonist. . . .

"For Dr. Ireland's conclusions and the evidence on which they are based, we must refer the reader to the work under review itself. We cannot fail to derive both pleasure and profit from its perusal, and will rise from a study of these essays as we have done, with a high sense of the learning, the industry, and the acuteness of the author. We have no doubt that Dr. Ireland's last contribution to the literature of psychological medicine will be as well received as the 'Blot on the Brain.' In America the thoughtful and unprejudiced essay on Guiteau cannot fail to be read with the greatest interest."—*Journal of Mental Science*, January, 1890.

"There are indications of wide reading in this volume, of careful inquiry, and of special and unusual familiarity with the problems it deciphers."—*Newcastle Daily Leader*, 1st January, 1890.

"The personages treated in it are not historically as important as those who form the subject of the preceding volume, 'The Blot on the Brain,' but the

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OPINIONS OF THE PRESS—*continued.*

writing is equally clear and terse, and Dr. Ireland has again to be congratulated on his excellence of work. His biographical sketches of Swedenborg, William Blake, Louis II. of Bavaria, Charles T. Guiteau, Louis Riel, Gabriel Malagrida, Theodore of Abyssinia, and Theebaw of Burmah, are highly interesting reading. His critical examination of their mental state is a valuable contribution to the study of psychology and forensic medicine, and should do much to assist our legal brethren and legislators in interpreting and framing laws dealing with questions of lunacy.”—*Dublin Journal of Medical Science*, January, 1890.

“Dr. Ireland’s researches serve to throw a light on many events of comparatively recent occurrence. An investigation and exposition, by a psychologist of recognised ability, of the mental characteristics of individuals who occupy a prominent place in the world’s history, cannot fail to prove interesting to the reading public generally, and ‘Through the Ivory Gate’ will, we are sure, have accorded to it a reception as cordial as that which was given, both at home and abroad, to its predecessor, ‘The Blot on the Brain.’”—*Glasgow Medical Journal*, January, 1890.

“The sketches are eminently readable, and the first of them has, from the character and influence of its subject, a special interest.”—*Mind*, January, 1890.

“The doctor here presents two alternatives: Either Swedenborg had supernatural gifts, or he was insane. We admit it. We ask that the test should be applied and that judgment should be given. . . .

“This reply of Hamlet to his mother is our reply to Dr. Ireland: Bring Swedenborg to the test. When was he unable to re-word the matter which he had written? Is not there the most wonderful consistency in the twenty or thirty volumes produced during the last twenty or thirty years of his life? Had he been labouring under ‘delusional insanity,’ would not his madness during that lengthy period have gambolled from his previous statements? But nothing of the kind can be discovered in all Swedenborg’s voluminous writings. Oh, Dr. Ireland, had you possessed the fine saneness of the subject of your ready verdict, you would never have produced your odd mixture of reason and unreason, of candour and prejudice, of learning and ignorance.”—*Morning Light: A New Church Weekly Journal*, 11th January, 1890.

“This book like its remarkable predecessor, ‘The Blot on the Brain,’ embraces a series of historical psychological studies; and whether regarded as a *vidimus* of striking biographical portraits, or as an inquiry into the mental life and public conduct of notable characters, it deserves a place among the best books of present day literature.”—*Medical Press and Circular*, 5th February, 1890.

“To Swedenborg’s peculiar theology (still propagated amongst us, and of late defended, somewhat feebly, against Dr. Ireland’s attack, if we mistake not) our author devotes a very large part of the book under notice. That Swedenborg was the subject of delusions cannot be doubted by any one, save by those who simply elect to believe that he had veritable intercourse with the spirit world. . . .

“Space fails us to follow Dr. Ireland’s weird studies into further detail. His sketches of Guiteau, Riel, and the kings Theebaw and Theodore, are masterly and of exceeding interest. His book is the work of a keen, reflective, and judicial mind. He does not mince matters, it is true, but neither does he exaggerate nor distort the plain facts on which his studies are based. As an expert in mental diseases Dr. Ireland writes with authority. It is only bare justice to add that he writes also with grace and power, and that as a consequence his book is one to be read and re-read by all students of history, and by all interested in the problems of man’s social evolution. Several fine engravings add to the attractiveness of the work.”—*Health*, 28th February.

“It would appear, indeed, as if much study of the ‘Ivory Gate’ had distorted and ‘fancified’ his own views on a good many points. But he knows what he is about in his own particular line; he has thoroughly studied all the windy ways of ‘medico-legal,’ and the actual interest of the strange cases which he has here set himself to examine is undeniable, though they may seem to be rather oddly grouped.”—*Saturday Review*, 8th March.

“This book is an entertaining clinical study in historical psychiatry, by an alienist of acknowledged ability.”—*Alienist and Neurologist*, April, 1890.

“While discrediting Swedenborg’s claims as a seer by a convincing demonstration of his insanity, the writer recognises at the same time his influence in liberalising religious belief. Also, while abundantly appreciating his conspicuous

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OPINIONS OF THE PRESS—*continued.*

learning, wonderful mental capacity, and thoroughly scientific methods of inquiry, he makes it very evident that the titles of discoverer in the scientific, and reformer in the religious, world, are by no means deserved. We are brought on to firmer ground, also, in the matter of the form of insanity from which he suffered. Another writer's interpretation of his morbid history, which leads him to impute his hallucinations to epilepsy, leaves far more to be explained than does the gradual unfolding of a case of paranoia as here seen—so true to nature that few who are familiar with insanity in its various aspects, can fail to be impressed by it. Next, in point of length and importance, is a description of the career of Guiteau, the assassin of President Garfield, which is chiefly interesting as the first thorough and unbiassed examination, in all its aspects, of this celebrated but somewhat hackneyed case by a competent foreign critic. That which will commend itself to the discriminating reader in this account, as in all of Dr. Ireland's papers, is his conspicuous fairness. This is shown in his use of every accessible point that is relevant, respect for the opinion of others, and careful balancing of conflicting evidence. When, therefore, he reaches the conclusion that Guiteau was unmistakably insane, we can but wonder if, after this analysis, there can be any further scepticism on the subject among sensible people."—*Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, 10th April, 1890.

"The most interesting part of the book, of course, is that devoted to an analysis of Swedenborg's life. . . . The stories of Louis of Bavaria, and of Guiteau, are also very interesting, especially to alienists and psychologists. Doubtless, some will take exception to some of Mr. Ireland's deductions, but all must allow that he has written a most entertaining book."—*Philadelphia Medical and Surgical Reporter*, 3rd May, 1890.

"The book is an acceptable addition to the literature of psychology and psychiatry."—*New York Medical Journal*, 31st May.

"Many people, and people of high intelligence too, have declared their conviction that Swedenborg was not a lunatic at all. Few would assert the same of Blake; but Blake had more of the 'great wit' than of the madman in him. . . . There is a curious account, too, of Gabriel Malagrida, an ex-Jesuit, who was strangled and burned for heresy, at Lisbon, in 1761."—*Spectator*, 28th June.

"'Through the Ivory Gate,' like its predecessor 'The Blot on the Brain,' which deservedly enjoys a European reputation, consists of a series of biographies, written with a scientific purpose. . . . Dr. Ireland is well qualified for the task which he has undertaken. He possesses an attractive, though somewhat unequal style. He knows the law of insanity as well as its pathology. Every page of his book bears traces of honest study. He has no preconceived theory which wars against accuracy. Dr. Ireland enters upon the debatable ground to investigate, not to dogmatise. Perhaps no lawyer, and certainly no member of the medical profession—with the exception of Professor Gairdner—could have given a more judicial summary of the evidence for and against Guiteau."—A. WOOD RENTON.—*British Weekly*, 18th July, 1890.

"Those who desire a readable summary of the peculiar views of this wonderful and learned man, who through all his mysticism and mistiness recognised some great truths must consult Dr. Ireland's book."

"The cases of Charles Guiteau and of Louis Riel are of great medico-legal interest, and after carefully reviewing the facts of their lives, and of their medico-legal examinations, Dr. Ireland is of opinion that both were insane."

"In a most interesting chapter the incidents connected with the insanity of King Louis of Bavaria are given, with a full account of the heroic death of Dr. Gudden who was drowned by the King."

"The Life of Theodore is also interesting. Enough has been said to show that Dr. Ireland has again succeeded in writing a pleasant and instructive book which, it may be added, is well got up, and is illustrated with portraits."—*Edinburgh Medical Journal*, September, 1890.

"For analysis of mental phenomena in health and disease, for epitome of character as the result of study of analysis, for cleanliness of treatment, if one may say so, these essays are historical. . . . But still from cover to cover, the pages entrance and hold the mind in abeyance, under the subtle influence of a writer who ventures far, because his wide and accurate knowledge combines so well with his sagacity and matured wisdom."—*The Asclepiad*, by Dr. B. W. RICHARDSON, 3rd quarter, 1890.







